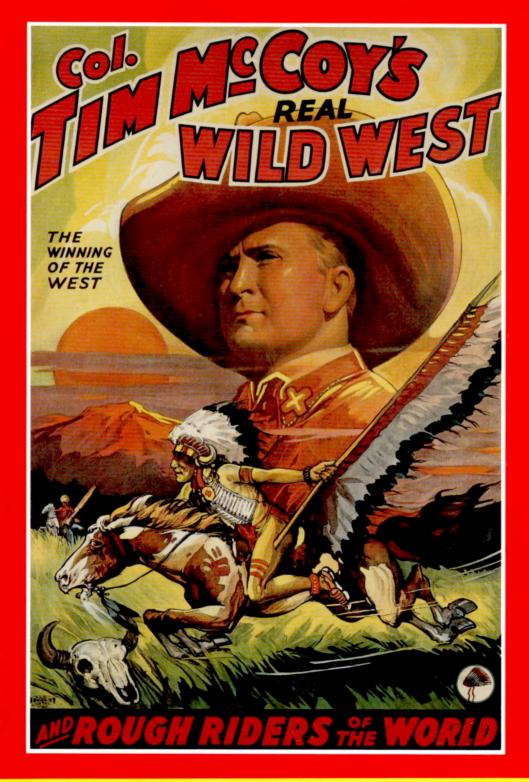
# Bandwagon THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November-December 1990



# CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Vol. 34, No. 6

November-December 1990

#### FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR

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#### THIS MONTH'S COVER

After being featured for three years on Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey movie cowboy Tim McCoy and a group of investors spent \$400,000 to tour a completely new wild west show in 1938. The show lasted only a few weeks.

Eleven beautiful lithographs were designed for the Col. Tim McCoy Real Wild West Show and Rough Riders of the World. The Tooker-Moore Litho Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania did the printing.

The litho on our cover illustrates the quality of the posters used by the show.

The original is in the Pfening Archives. Our thanks to Bill Biggerstaff for providing the color separations.

#### 1991 CHS CONVENTION

The 1991 Circus Historical Society convention will be held on Circus Flora from May 22-25 in Charleston, South Carolina. The meeting headquarters will be the Holiday Inn Riverside, which will have special rates of \$60 or \$65 for a room with a view of the river. Along with the traditional papers, presentations and auction, time will be allowed for members to explore historic Charleston which will be hosting a major arts festival during our meeting. More in-

formation about the gathering will appear in the January-February Bandwagon.

#### **MEMBERS** NEW

3642

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R.D. 3, Box 1352 Honesdale, PA 18431	
Michael B. Siedell 10720 N. 139th, Box 235 Waverly, NE 68462	3543
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Jim Palmer 900 Elmore Green Bay, WI 54303	3652
REINSTATED MEMBERS	

173 Indian Pong Rd. Kingston, MA 02364	
Gus and Betty Bell 5312 W. Ledbetter Dr.	3150
Dallas, TX 75236	

962

Rene I. Bouchard, Ir.

#### PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

Every issue of the Bandwagon is filled with circus history, both new research and reinterpretations of known information. Many hours are spent in libraries, archives, and microfilm reading rooms gleaning data from a host of sources. The circus appears to have a never ending source of research materials.

Researchers attempt to be as accurate as

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION as required by 39 U. S. C. 3685. BANDWAGON is published every two months at 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221.

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The average number of copies of each issue during the preceeding 12 months is: (A) Total number of copies printed: 1700; (B) Paid circulation:(1) through sales dealers, carriers, street vendors and counter sales: none; (2) mail subscriptions: 1426; (C) total paid circulation: 1426; (D) free distribution by mail carrier, or other means, samples, complementary and other free copies: 12; (E) total distribution: 1426; (F) copies not distributed: (1) office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: 274; returns from news agents: none; (G) total 1700.

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I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr., publisher. (9-19-90)

possible when reconstructing the history of a particular show or the life of a particular showman. Errors creep in because of the unique nature of the subject. Research materials, such as business records or correspondence, are often lacking. Only about 30% of all circus routes are known.

Fortunately, however, historians have a number of ways to check routes and other activities for a particular season. Route cards and route books are two methods used to document circus history, but even these have mistakes in them. Dif-



#### ATTENTION CFA VIDEO TAPE CUSTOMERS PLEASE NOTE

Recently advertised video tapes of the Great Circus Parade and Circus World Museum were not authorized by C.W.M., the copyright and trademark holder of these titles and presentations. All sales have been stopped. No further orders will be accepted. We sincerely regret any inconvience or misunderstanding possibly caused by the offering of these tapes.

ficulties arise when inaccurate information is printed.

Just recently the 1990 Carson & Barnes Circus route card #23 listed dates for September 6-8 at Houston and Uniontown, Pennsylvania and McHenry, Maryland. The September 6 date is correct, but the flash flood that drowned the show in the early morning of September 7 caused the cancellation of the next two stands. The official route card is therefore in error.

The correct information will appear in the 1990 route book which will also contain an unparalleled record of the season. Future historians will be glad to have this complete history of the year, especially after reading the "TBA" (to be announced) dates on the route cards.

A listing of published route books and route sheets was made by Bob Parkinson at the Circus World Museum working from a previous list compiled by Richard E. Conover in the late 1950s. In the decade since Parkinson's list a few more route books have been discovered, and there are presumably more out there. Before the listing is updated I would like to know if any member can provide information on previously unknown route books or route folders. To obtain a copy of the route book list send a large envelope with two stamps to me at 5980 Lannoo, Detroit, Michigan 48236. I hope a few members will have new discoveries which can be photocopied and placed in public collections for use by other researchers. John Polacsek

#### SEASON'S REVIEW

The annual review of the 1990 circus season will appear in the January-February *Bandwagon*. To make it as comprehensive as possible, readers are asked to send photos, information and clippings relating to the year to the author. Data relating to smaller shows, school shows, spot dates, Shrine and fair circuses will be especially appreciated. Material will be returned if specified. Send information to: Fred D. Pfening III, 2240 Tewksbury Road, Columbus, Ohio 43221. Please note new address.

Метгу Christmas and Нарру New Уеаг

Dred and Johann Dahlinger

#### CIRCUS VIGNETTES

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Mills (1950s) The Teardown RBBB

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CLYDE BEATTY

WINTER QUARTERS, FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

RALPH J. CLAWSON

he first circus owned by the late Clyde Beatty, famed wild animal trainer, was a large motorized show in 1945. Although Beatty's name had been part of the title of both railroad and truck shows before that seaon this was his first experience as an owner of his own circus. It was painful and tradition has long held that Clyde vowed he would never again field a motorized show, a vow he kept even though he did spend the final seasons of his long career on a truck show owned and managed by others. Hollywood producers who love to depict on film the trials and tribulations circuses would be inspired by following the problems of the 1945 Beatty show. There were blowdowns, fatal truck crashes, a major robbery, severe illness of key personnel, and even Uncle Sam came in to take away the equestrian director by military draft a few weeks into the season. But what soured Beatty most on mud shows was literally the rain and mud which gripped the show for days on end and the difficulty in keeping the well worn motorized equipment moving. All of this occurreed against the backdrop of wartime shortages of personnel, gas, tires, vehicles, rope, canvas, in fact most essential

items of equipment were in limited supply. All of these problems made the 1945 Beatty season one to remember, or for-

Some wags suggested that the show was just too big for a mudder, an accusation which ten years later would be leveled at Floyd King and Arnold Maley's giant King Bros. Circus. Beatty's show was indeed the largest truck show out that season. Several larger shows had taken to rails, leaving Beatty the undisputed king of the mudders.

Beatty's first experience on a motorized show came during the summer of 1940 when Hamid-Morton leased the

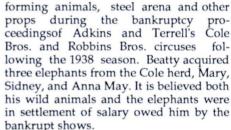
#### Season of 1945

#### By Joseph T. Bradbury

equipment of Ray W. Rogers' Wallace Bros. Circus from June 6 through August 10. Beatty's wild animal act was the feature of the performance and the show played sixteen stands, ranging from one to six days each, mainly under Shrine auspices. To make the tour Beatty constructed five cage trucks to haul his lions and tigers. These were former Coca Cola straight bed vehicles with a chassis long enough to accommodate five cage compartments on each one. Only four were used to house the animals used in the Beatty act. Two trucks were placed back to back and separate runways joined a single chute to the arena in the big top. The fifth truck contained extra animals or props but apparently was not used after 1940.

The foundation for show ownership was laid when Beatty purchased his per-

Clyde Beatty at the door of the office wagon in Columbus, Ohio on May 8, 1945. Fred Pfening photo.



In 1939 Beatty opened his Jungle Zoo near Fort Lauderdale, Florida. This provided a place to keep his animals during the off season and a potential winterquarters site for a future circus. During the early years of World War II he did well. In 1941 and 1942 his act along with the elephants provided the bulk of circus on the midway of the Johnny J. Jones Exposition, a large railroad carnival.

In 1943 Beatty joined with Ray Rogers using the title Clyde Beatty-Wallace Bros. Circus. It was one of the largest motorized shows on the road and had a profitable season.

The following year Beatty had the same setup with Art Concello using the Clyde Beatty-Russell Bros. Circus title. It was the largest truck show on the road in 1944. Wallace Bros., only slightly smaller

in size, could not match the strong Concello program. Even though Beatty's name was part of the title on both the Wallace and Russell shows he did not share in the profits or management.

In the fall of 1944 Ray Rogers became seriously ill and offered the Wallace show for sale. Beatty was ready to make his move and become a full fledged circus owner.

On October 1, 1944 in Dallas, Texas, Clyde Beatty purchased the Wallace Bros. Circus from Rogers. Ralph J. Clawson, who had managed the Wallace show in 1944, and Sterling (Duke) Drukenbrod were also present at the con-



tract signing. The Wallace title was not involved, nor was the York, South Carolina quarters where the equipment was then located It was agreed that Beatty could use the York property to prepare the show for the 1945 season. A down payment of \$5,000 was made with the balance to be paid during the 1945 season. Total sale price was \$60,000. Frank J. Walter, a wealthy Houston business man and close friend of Beatty, provided the financial backing for the purchase.

The 1944 Wallace Bros. Circus was covered in an article by this author in the July-August 1975 Bandwagon. The show moved on forty-eight trucks and had a large spread of canvas. The big top was a 140 with three 50s; the menagerie was a 90 with three 30's; the side show was an 80 with two 30s; and the padroom was a 40 with two 30s. The big top seated about 4,500 with six sections of grandstand on the long side, and a section of each side of the bandstand on the short side. Blues were at each end. The big top size possibly was exaggerated, but photos show it to have had two rows of quarter poles indicative that at least it was a 120 foot round. This notation is raised here because the Beatty show used a smaller big top early in the 1945 season.

Five Wallace Bros. elephants, Babe, Cora, Inez, Marion and Addie, were part of the sale. With the three Beatty already owned the 1945 herd was eight.

Added to the Wallace equipment were Beatty's four cage trucks, a large semi to carry the arena and props and an elephant semi. Beatty had cage space for nine male lions, four female lions and seven tigers.

The new show was titled Clyde Beatty's All New Trained Wild Animal Circus. The full title appeared on the motorized equipment and was used in all newspaper advertising and billing.

İmmediately after he purchased the show Beatty hired Ralph J. Clawson as manager. Jack Joyce was signed as equestrian director, and Sterling (Duke) Drukenbrod, as side show manager. Durkenbrod had been with Beatty on the Johnny J. Jones show. Clawson was at once given the responsibility of getting the show ready for the road as Beatty was busy with a series of fall and winter indoor dates.

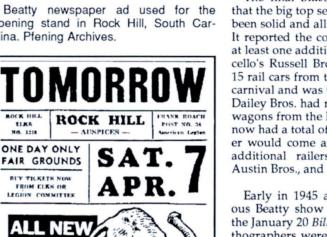
The November 4 Billboard told of the Wallace show sale and stated that the York quarters would be used until new quarters could be built in conjunction with the Beatty Jungle Zoo in Fort Lauderdale.

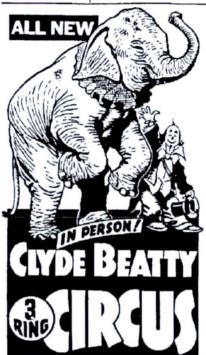
The December 16, 1944 Billboard reported that Beatty had recently spent several days at the York quarters inspecting the equipment and making plans for next season. Beatty announced he planned

innovations and would head a greatly enlarged show, opening in April. He had arrived from Houston, Texas after the close of the Shrine show there. He was to return to Houston to get his acts and equipment ready for a Ray Rogers date in Mexico City.

The same issue also contained the first Beatty advertisement wanting a man ca-

opening stand in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Pfening Archives.





PRESENTING SCORES OF NEW AND AMAZING FEATURES INCLUDING

#### CLYDE BEATTY IN PERSON

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BARON NOVAK Tiniest Man INCOMPARABLE DISPLAY OF MENAGE AND LIBERTY HORSES

Itemarkably Educated CHIMPANZEES A Host Of HEADLINE ACTS  pable of handling and training two young black female bears. John Helliot and Joe Arcaris were asked to answer. Also wanted were ring stock hands who "have worked with me before." Offered for sale was one good rosin back mare and a spotted liberty horse. Response was to go to lack Joyce, c/o Clyde Beatty Circus, winter quarters, York, South Carolina.

The final Billboard for 1944 headlined that the big top season just concluded had been solid and all had hit a paying streak. It reported the coming season would see at least one additional rail show. Art Concello's Russell Bros. Circus had acquired 15 rail cars from the Beckman and Gerety carnival and was to put the show on rails. Dailey Bros. had recently bought cars and wagons from the Frank West carnival and now had a total of 30 cars in quarters. Later would come announcements that two additional railers were being framed, Austin Bros., and Arthur Bros.

Early in 1945 advertisements for various Beatty show needs came rapidly. In the January 20 Billboard billposters and lithographers were wanted. A long season and top salary were promised. Those interested were to contact Harry Kackley, agent, at a Zanesville, Ohio address. The January 27 issue contained a major advertisement and for the first time the official new title was used. It read: "Wanted for the Clyde Beatty All New Trained Wild Animal Circus for the big show. Strong act to feature; girls for aerial web ballet; menage riders; ground and novelty acts; dog and pony act; clowns and wild west people for concert. Ticket sellers for big show; boss canvasman; electricians, boss property man; seatmen; working men in all departments and one more painter, must be good letter man. Write or wire. Clyde Beatty Circus, Winter quarters, York, South Carolina. Performers contact Jack Joyce; all others Ralph Claw-

Also in the January 27 issue was a short piece stating that Beatty and Clawson had signed a group of Mexican acts including the Escalantes, flying act; the Esquedas, casting act; Hermana Ibarra, bars and trampoline and a musical act for the side show. Some of these acts did not appear in the performance or worked under different names.

The February 17 Billboard noted that the Beatty show was preparing for an April opening and that activities at the York quarters had been greatly increased in recent weeks. Beatty and Clawson returned in January from the circus engagement in Mexico City. The prior week Paul M. Conway, Macon, Georgia attorney and Charles Sparks, retired circus owner, had spent two days in quarters conferring with Beatty and Clawson. They, ac-



Clyde Beatty in the big cage at Columbus, Ohio on May 8. Fred Pfening photo.

companied by Beatty, went to Charlotte, North Carolina to visit Ray W. Rogers who was in the hospital there.

Further details on the work at York quarters came a week later. The story said that the skeleton crew which had been maintained there during December and January had been augmented after the return of Beatty and Clawson. Men were engaged in rebuilding all equipment purchased the prior fall. From that time until the opening date all crews were to be increased. It was estimated that by March 1 about one hundred men would be in quarters. The piece noted that Deacon and Dave McIntosh and Chancey Flournoy headed the motor rebuilding department and practically all equipment would have new motors. The paint shop opened and several units had already been repainted in a cream color with blue lettering.

It was mentioned that general agent

Victor Robbins and his eleven piece band in Columbus, Ohio. Fred Pfening photo.



William Moore had arrived week before for conferences on a proposed route. Harry Kackley, advance car manager, had arrived from Zanesville to supervise the building of new advance equipment. Walter Bronlee was in charge of the office. Walter Hohn was acting as purchasing until the season opened when he would join the inside ticket staff.

Charles Oliver, steward, was on hand with part of his crew. Enoch Bradford was to be big top canvas boss, assisted by Jack Nevill. Jack Joyce, equestrian director, had spent the winter breaking a twelve horse liberty number and and a sixteen horse menage act. All new harness had been purchased by Joyce. Bert Petus, head elephant trainer, had worked out a number of new formations and routines.

Victor Robbins, after an absence of several years from the road, had been signed as musical director and had contracted a sixteen piece band. He was to be in quarters early in March to assist in producing the spec and arrange the big show music. Duke Drukenbrod, the side show manager, had contracted a strong array of kid show features.

Concluding, the report said that Beatty had told the local papers, "My intention and policy for the Clyde Beatty, world's largest trained wild animal circus, is to have an organization beyond criticism as to business methods and to engage the best acts and features available to make this one of the cleanest circuses on the road."

In mid-March the show advertised for candy butchers, promising a thirty-two

week season in the east and middle west. Those interested were to contact Al Dennis at the Morrison Hotel, Chicago.

A Billboard report dated March 17 said that activities in all departments at York had been increased and a number of labor saving devices had been installed. While in Chicago Ralph Clawson purchased wardrobe,

flags and other equipment for a United Nations tournament. The article noted that painting had been completed with the motor equipment in cream with red and blue lettering; grandstand, army green; blues, a bright red; stringers, dark blue, and grandstand chairs, a dark orange.

Beatty and George Penny, with their wives, arrived on March 12. Beatty left for Fort Lauderdale, Florida a few days later to check on the rebuilding and painting of animal cages and semis at the Beatty zoo there.

Marshall Green and Arnold Maley arrived in quarters to handle the office work. Other notes said that Harry Kackley was assembling his ten man crew of billers and lithographers in readiness for an early departure. General agent Bill Moore had left three weeks before. Joan Bronlee and seamstresses were making wardrobe for the aerial ballet girls. Beatty and Clawson had worked out new lighting effects. Ralph Clawson stated that he would have the show ready four days prior to the opening stand. Tex Sherman joined Raymond Dean in quarters to handle the press department. Dean had been in quarters for three weeks preparing new publicity material.

The March 31 Billboard reported the Beatty circus would open its season April 7 at Rock Hill, South Carolina and then make a Sunday move to Charlotte, North Carolina. Bill Moore was in the Akron-Canton area of Ohio and had booked Portsmouth, Columbus and East Liverpool. Columbus was set for a three-day engagement May 7-9. A final note said rehearsals were scheduled to start at the York quarters the following week. New costumes purchased in Chicago had arrived.

The show placed a ad in the same issue wanting a prima donna, white faced clowns and girls to work aerial web and ride menage. A week later a Beatty ad wanted working men in all departments, offering the best sleeping accommodations and best cookhouse on the road. An air calliope player was needed. This ad appeared just as the show was about to open.

Side show manager Sterling (Duke) Drukenbrod announced in the April 7 Billboard a strong lineup of features including Marvin Smith, anatomical wonder; Jennie Reynolds, doll lady; Grace Webb, juggler; Leatha Smith, sword swallower; David Lano and Carolyn Chaney, marionettes; Rosita Reverdy, ladder of torture; Jolly Joyce, queen of electricity; Frank Webb, magician; Mary Devon, lionface girl; Professor Ward, tattooed man; Johanna Rittley, mentalist; Don Carlos with a five person Mexican revue; Babe LaBarie, human paradox, and H. C.

Brown's fourteen person minstrel review.

L. R. Knight, Jack Sweetman, Doc Burns and Ray McKinney were to be ticket sellers. Whitey Summers was to be boss canvasman, assisted by Aaron Miller. A new bannerline from Nieman Studios and new canvas from the Jessop Tent Company had arrived.

The 1945 circus season had now arrived. Six railroad shows were at the starting gate, the largest number since 1938. They included Ringling-Barnum, 79 cars; Cole Bros., 25; Dailey Bros., 15; Russell Bros., 15; Arthur Bros., 15 and Austin Bros., 10. Motorized outfits were Clyde Beatty, Dan Rice, Mills Bros., Bailey Bros., Cronin Bros., Lewis Bros., Lee Bros., Bud Anderson, Hunt Bros., Bell Bros., Hugo Bros., Bradley & Benson, M. L. Clark, C. R. Montgomery, Barker Bros., Monroe Bros., Sello Bros., Stevens Bros., Beers-Barnes, Bond Bros., Bernard Bros., Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros., and Yankee Patter-

The first few months of the new circus

season witnessed some of the most important events ever experienced by the American people. The first week of the Beatty season saw the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and less than a month later, the end of the war in Europe. In August came the atomic and subbomb sequent surrender of Japan bringing

World War II to a close.

Details are missing on the exact size of. the canvas layout for the Beatty 1945 season. Photos indicate the spread included the big top, menagerie, side show, padroom and cookhouse. All of the usable tentage in the Wallace Bros. purchase would have been available. A new side show top had been received. Canvas was extremely difficult to obtain during the war due to military requirements, but this eased somewhat toward the end of hostilities. A later Billboard report stated Beatty was using only a 100 foot round top, but this must have been in error as it would have been very small. The big top probably was a 110 foot as the show offered for sale later in the year.

The April 14 Billboard covered the show's initial stand: "Good biz greets Beatty opener; layout sparkles.

"Rock Hill, South Carolina April 7. The Clyde Beatty Circus, resplendent in elaborate costumes and much new equipment made its debut to capacity business here. Matinee drew a straw house, biggest of the two.



'Glowing praise was sounded on all sides for the high standard of excellence of the performance, as well as the creditable physical properties. Everything had a spick and span appearance.

Although Beatty has been interested in other shows, this is actually the first show the popular wild animal trainer has ever



Two sleeper semis and a prop truck on the Beatty lot in Columbus, Ohio. Fred Pfening photo.

owned, and he was actively in charge onopening day, besides starring in his owner role and in the steel arena.

"Show is paced distinctly as an animal circus. Besides Beatty's act, his wife, Hariett, works the elephant and riding tiger; Albert Fleet work a group of lions and later a chimp act. The liberty horses and menage number, produced by Jack Joyce,

The Beatty big top in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania May 28, 1945. Bob Good photo.

equestrian director, also are outstanding -features. The show boats also of more than the usual number of attractive girl performers, especially noticeable in the aerial ballet number.

"Ralph Clawson is manager and did a remarkably good job of whipping the big show together within a period of a little more than seven weeks.

"Ray W. Rogers, former circus owner, who manages Richard Novak, midget concert attraction, suffered another heart attack in his trailer after the opening performance and was carried to the York County Hospital where his condition is serious.

"More than a score of showmen visitors journeyed here for the opening."

Another article in the same Billboard said that Dayton, Ohio would see the Beatty show on May 5 and 6 and Cole Bros. on May 17-18.

A week later the Billboard gave more sidelights on the Beatty opening. It noted that although some key positions were held by those who had been on Wallace Bros. for the most part the Beatty show was a new organization. Many of the excutives and performers were from the West Coast. Arnold Maley, who had not

The 1945 Clyde Beatty Circus on a lot. Sam Chapman photo.



trouped for several years, but had formaly been in the wagon of several American Circus Corporation shows, was in the red wagon. Jimmy Albanese was also in the office wagon. Maley and Clawsonhad trouped together for several years in the 1930s.

Walt Bronlee, formerly in the Wallace Bros. office, was in the white wagon. Other holdovers from the former ownership included David and Alex (Deacon) McIntosh, mechanical and transportation heads; Walter Hawn, inside tickets and Bert Petus, superintendent of elephants.

The story noted that Vic Robbins directed an excellent band of fourteen, which played the opening score without a bobble. Press agents Ray Dean and Tex Sherman obtained excellent showings in the South and North Carolina papers.

The official staff included Ralph J. Clawson, general manager; James Albanese, treasurer; Marshall Green, legal adjuster; Arnold Maley, secretary; Walter Bronlee, auditor; William Moore, general agent and Ray B. Dean and Tex Sherman press agents.

The *Billboard* did not publish a complete review of the performance. The show issued a twenty page program which listed the performance as:

- 1. Spec, United Nations on parade.
- 2. Comedy acrobatic acts by Don Pablo and the Wilsons.
- 3. Capt. Cramer (Albert Fleet) and his lions.
  - 4. Clowns.
- 5. Martha Joyce dogs and pony; Albert Fleet's chimps and Cramers bears.
- 6. Cloud swing, Grace McIntosh; the Townsends, double trapeze.
- 7. Harriett Beatty's tiger riding an elephant.
  - 8. Ethel's and Wilson's dogs.
  - 9. Clowns.
- 10. Jean Evans and Grace McIntosh, single trapeze
- 11. Clyde Beatty and his lions and tigers.
- 12. Pauline Penny, wire act; McIntosh Sisters, wire act.
  - 13. Clowns.
- 14. Elephants presented by Miss Marie (Petus) and Miss DeVinney.
- 15. Contortion acts by Kinko and Lloyd Center.
- 16. Ajax with taxi meter mule on the hippodrome track.
- 17. Rolling globe acts by the Henrys and Craigs.
- 18. Jack Joyce and the Morgan stallion, 'Thunder Cloud," feature act of a three ring and hippodrome presentation of horses.
  - 19. Clowns.
- 20. Hand balancing and juggling by Bettina and Rosa; Don Juan and the Craigs.

- 21. Beatty's liberty horses presented by Jack Jovce.
  - 22. Aerial ballet.
- 23. Beatty's elephants presented by Bert Petus.

24. The Flying Escavitas.

Although there were cages available from Wallace Bros. there is no evidence in photos that the Beatty menagerie contained any animals other than those working in the big show acts including the twenty lions and tigers in Beatty's act, the lions and bears worked by Albert Fleet and Fleet's chimps. Photos indicate there were two camels and eight elephants. The four cage trucks used for the Beatty act were usually parked in the

With the large number of other circuses opposition was inevitable, sometimes with smaller shows, but often with the twenty-five car Cole show. This was especially true early in the season in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

The season started well for the show and some of the best business experienced all year came during the early weeks. However, tragedy struck on April 21 while the show was moving from Portsmouth to Petersburg, Virginia. Mack Ernest Kitchen, age 17, of York was killed when the circus truck he was driving sideswiped two trucks parked on route 400, two miles east of Ivor, Virginia. Fortunately another circus employee who



Bert Petus and the eight Beatty elephants in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Bob Good photo.

backyard. If lots were large enough the animals were placed in a menagerie top.

The show was large enough to play the major cities of any state and it was planned to play a goodly number of two day stands, plus several three dayers. However from start to finish one day stands were plentiful, taxing both the equipment and workingmen to the fullest.

In the meantime Beatty had been engaged in a fight with the city council in Fort Lauderdale over a proposed ordinance which would have barred all wild animals within the city limits after October 1. If passed this would have prevented his Jungle Zoo from operating. The battle to eliminate the zoo was headed by the Victoria Park Improvement Association, but at several hearings it was pointed out that the local Chamber of Commerce had asked Beatty to establish the zoo there in a bid for tourist dollars. In late April the ordinance was finally killed by the council.

After the opening a single stand was played in South Carolina. Then the show worked its way northward through North Carolina and the Virginias, on to Ohio.

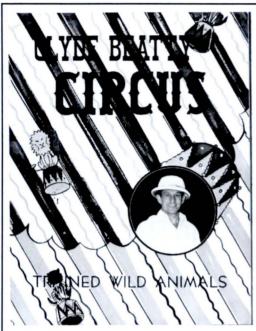
was riding with Kitchen suffered only lacerations and bruises. Drivers of the two other trucks involved, which evidently were parked illegally on the highway, were arrested on charges of involuntary manslaughter.

Changes in management and performing personnel were common during the season on not only the Beatty show but others as well. The *Billboard* carried several ads each week listing the various "wants" of different circuses. In the July 5 issue Duke Drukenbrod wanted a black band leader, musicians, comedians, minstrel girls, a featured freak and bally acts.

The May 12 *Billboard* provided the first report on Beatty business to date saying. "Fall territory gives Beatty big spring business.

'The show has had a most successful tour from Rock Hill, South Carolina through a section always known as fall territory. The first week at Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Durham, Rocky Mount and Roanoke Rapids, all North Carolina, gave capacity business.

"Norfolk and Newport News, Virginia, each two-day engagements, also produced turnaway crowds, while Portsmouth, Lynchburg, Petersburg Roanoke, and Pulaski, all Virginia gave big days. Late arrival at Bluefield, West Virginia caused a delayed matinee with a three



The 1945 Beatty program contained a number of photos of the Jungle Zoo in Fort Lauderdale. Pfening Archives.

quarter house and a capacity crowd atnight. Beckley surprised even the town folk by capacity business. Charleston, a three day run, put them on the ground each night, Sunday and Monday matinees were turnaways. Huntington on May 1 was another banner day.

was another banner day.
"Manager Clawson has a smoothrunning organization. New trucks had
been purchased along the route and oth-

Clyde and Harriett Beatty ready for a performance in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Bob Good photo.



er needed equipment added. One new light plant was purchased at Norfolk and another at Charleston, West Virginia. A larger top, a 130 foot round with three 50's, was to be used from Columbus, Ohio on, giving added seating capacity which had been sorely needed.

"Walter Bronlee, timekeeper and auditor, was stricken with a heart attack and returned to his York, South Carolina home. Thomas Buchanon had replaced Marshall Green as legal adjuster.

"As star of his own show, Beatty has worked hard on new routines and stunts for his cats. His wife, Harriett, works a tiger and elephant act. The first half finds animal acts predominating but after the arena is dismantled, circus acts take over."

The show moved into Ohio May 2 at Ironton and remained in the Buckeye state for eleven days. Two days were spent in Dayton, three in Columbus, with the rest one-dayers. Cole Bros., scheduled to play ten days later, provided opposition in Columbus.

An account of a *Billboard* reporter's visit to the the show in Columbus appeared in the May 19 issue, and was headed, "Beatty hoists bigger top. New organization whips many setbacks.

"Clyde Beatty has extensive plans for the enlargement of his circus and the first step took place in Columbus, Ohio on May 8 when a new 130 foot round top with three 50s replaced the 100 foot top used since the season's bow on April 7.

'The new top was purchased from J. W. Conklin and is the same one used to house exhibits at his Fair for Britain in Toronto. The old top was returned to a manufacturer for repairs and later shipment to Fort Lauderdale, Florida quarters to be held for an emergency.

"Beatty has been adding so much equipment that he is now gasing fifty-six semis and big trucks for each move. The new top will enable him to increase the seating capacity to almost 5,600 and still have ample aisle space for required exits.

"When the show was visited May 10 by the circus editor of the *Billboard*, it was raining ice water in the early afternoon and the matinee attendance was held to a snappy 400. The matinee was missed Tuesday (8) due to high winds and inexperienced circus hands. Night business was strong Tuesday and Wednesday, with Thursday's frigid temperature keening 'em away in droves.

"I know this doesn't look very good, but a peek at the books will prove we did a tremendous business to date despite heart-breaking setbacks,' manager Clawson declared. Clawson remained in bed Wednesday nursing a heavy cold, and Harriett Beatty missed two performances for the same reason.

"Shortly after we opened our pole truck burned. We held to our schedule without a big top, and business was amazing,' Clawson continued. 'We will have to make some more changes as we go along, as our 10 foot side wall poles are two feet too short for this top, but as soon as we can get them cut we will be able to increase both our grandstand and blues capacity.'

"Jack Joyce, equestrian director and trainer of a fine liberty act as well as an excellent group of high school horses, left Wednesday for military induction at Columbia, South Carolina, despite the fact he will be thirty-eight in October and is a father. He has been replaced by Merritt Belew, a veteran horseman who was long associated with Tom Mix.

"The program naturally leaned heavily to the wild animal type, with Beatty working the big act. His steeplechase with lions and tigers gave him a thrilling blow-

"Reports obtained from sources other than the circus show two straw houses at Ironton, Ohio on May 2; two full houses at Portsmouth on May 3, despite light rain and an average of three quarters houses for four showings in Dayton on May 5-6, despite a 5 p. m. matinee the first day. Monday at Springfield the matinee was okay, but the night house tumbled when Germany's capitulation was announced.

The staff in addition to Clawson as general manager includes William Moore. general agent; Art Miller and Oscar Wiley, contracting agents; Harry Kackley, car manager with ten men; William Nippold, 24 hour man; Ray Dean, Tex Sherman and Hal Oliver, press; James Altreasurer; Arnold Maley, secretary; Mrs. Albanese, downtown tickets; George Foster, timekeeper and white wagon; Frank Wald, front door; George Penny, ticket boss and purchasing; Yellow Burnett, Jimmie McGee and Harold Sheppard, inside tickets; Vic Robbins, band master; Rose Clawson, tax box; Mel Rennick, wardrobe; Bert Petus, elephants; David and Deacon McIntosh, transportation and Robert Briggs, lights.

"Duke Drukenbrod has the side show and John and Dorothy Sheesley, an iron lung show. The Jacobs brothers have all concessions."

After Columbus the show played two additional Ohio stands, Newark and Zanesville. The business was held to three quarter houses in Zanesville due to wait paper being posted by the Cole show. The show returned to West Virginia for a single date at Wheeling on May 14 where the matinee drew three quarter house. That night, with the tent packed, the lights went out. Patrons lit matches but this was promptly squelched by alert employees.



Beatty entered Pennsylvania the next day at Washington to begin a series of ten stands across the state. Two day engagements came at Johnstown, Harrisburg, Lancaster, and Allentown. After a one day trip into New Jersey on May 31 at Phillipsburg, Beatty returned to the Keystone state for two days each in Norristown and Chester.

It was during this stretch of route that multiple troubles descended on the Beatty show. The worst was a blow down at Greensburg, Pennsylvania on May 16. There was a capacity audience at the night show when a violent wind and rain storm ripped the big top canvas and finally dropped it.

The circus blowdown was about the biggest thing to ever to hit (no pun intended) the city. On May 17 the Greensburg Morning Review published an article with a column headline on the front page.

"Wind storm blows circus tent down, four are hurt.

"Loss to circus is estimated at around \$10,000.

'Three thousand spectators who had enjoyed evening performance of the Clyde Beatty Circus on the Hilltop grounds here last night, made their exit from under the big top before a sudden tornado-like storm blew the tent down.

Three circus employees were hurt, two of whom were admitted to the hospital. All were injured as they worked to get spectators to safety. A Greensburg spectator also was injured.

"Mrs. Clara Smith of 719 Sidney Street was treated in the Westmoreland Hospital for a deep laceration of the right knee cap. She was not admitted.

"Marvin F. Bailey, 25 years old, of Texas, received a possible Internal injuries. He was employed by the Clyde Beatty Circus and was injured as he helped the crowd out. He was admitted to the hospital.

"Curtis Riley, 20, of Fort Mills, South Carolina, also a circus employee, received an injury of the left ankle. He was admitted to the hospital.

A sail maker repairing the Beatty big top after the blown down in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Pfening Archives.

"Frank Shepard, 57 years old, also a circus employee, was struck by a falling pole and received the dislocation of his right

"First evidence that a storm of more than usual magnitude was brewing came when a sudden gust of wind set an end pole swaying. That was at 9:15 p.m., about fifteen minutes after Beatty's famous wild animal act had been completed and the steel arena which caged the animals had been taken down.

'At that time about 100 persons came down off general admission seats and dashed for the exits.

'Fifteen minutes later when the real storm broke with lightning, high wind and a torrential downpour, the big top had been cleared of its audience.

"Manager Ralph Clawson estimates the loss to the circus will amount to about \$10,000. Part of the big top, a 130' round top' just bought by the show last week at Columbus, Ohio, has been shredded. The enlarged tent was se-

cured because the circus had been playing to crowds that over flowed the slightly smaller tent used

"R. B. Dean, press representative, announced last night that the circus was packing up at midnight and would play per schedule in Johnstown today.

"When the first gust of wind struck and a hundred or so dashed for the exits, the circus sent a riding troop into the ring. The highly schooled horses did their act, but all the time the circus attendants, everybody from candy butchers to razorbacks, quietly conducted a campaign to get the people out. A post office employee was noticed ushering people in his vicinity to a quick exit. A score of men dropped to the ground from sitting pretty well up at the top, and then invited children to jump into their arms. Hundreds of women and children were helped out in this manner. Circus attendants in the fifteen feverish minutes before the wind got under the big top and caused it to capsize, lowered the side walls. Clowns returned to the ring and in clear ringing voices invited the women and children to follow them to the outside.

The crowd emerged into the open became thoroughly soaked in a matter of split seconds. They were lashed by wind and bewildered, rain soaked, but unhurt. There was total darkness because as quickly as the big top came down, all electric current was turned off to prevent any possible fire.

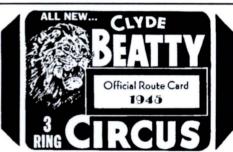
"Beatty, in a dressing gown, and manager Clawson crawled on their hands and knees under the canvas, personally directing the search of circus employees or for any person who might accidently have been caught under the rain-soaked canvas. They found no one.

"In all my experience I have never known an audience to keep their heads like these people'-that was repeated by circus personnel many times before the night was over.

The circus experienced a little trouble getting into Greensburg Wednesday afternoon and was late in arriving. The trouble was variously assigned to truck break downs and to drivers losing their way. The afternoon show was started at 4:15. The night show came on a half hour late, at 8:30.

The May 26 Billboard also told of the

The Clyde Beatty Circus 1945 route cards listed Ft. Lauderdale, Florida as winter quarters. Pfening Archives.



DATE	- TOWA	STATE	MILES
July 9	Corning	New York	48
July 10	Olean	New York	80
July 11	Bradford	Penna.	25
July 12	Warren	Penna.	35
July 13	Oil City	Penna.	54
July 14	Sharon	Penna.	43
July 16	SUNDAY East Liverpool	Ohio	51
July 17	McKeesport	Penna.	50
July 18	Uniontown	Penna.	49
July 19	Morgantown	West Va.	25
July 20	Fairmont	West Va.	18
July 21	Clarksburg	West Va.	25
July 23	SUNDAY Parkershurg	West Va.	81

blowdown in an article headed, "Beatty boxes trouble.

"The canvas was spread over a flock of acres in Altoona as sailmakers strove to repair the damage wrought by a violent rain and wind storm in Greensburg May 16, but the atmosphere still reverberated with echos of praise on circus officials and employees for their fine work in handling the public in face of a possible disaster.

"Fifteen minutes after Beatty had completed his wild animal act, near midway in the performance, the wind rose to such proportion that the quarter poles started to dance, and employees started systematically to clear the tent. Clowns continued to work and Vic Robbins' band whooped it up. The tent was cleared almost before the audience realized what was happening, despite the fact that the people were being pushed into a torrential rain.

'The net result: Three circus employees, Marvin F. Bailey, Curtis Riley and Frank Shepard, required hospitalization. Mrs. Clara Smith, reported sustaining a possible broken knee-cap, was the only spectator injured. The big top was torn so badly that the show was forced to work with sidewall for four performances at Johnstown and Altoona. Owner Clyde Beatty, using a dressing gown to cover his scanty attire, and manager Ralph Clawson crawled under the soaked canvas to make a thorough search to be certain that no spectator or employee was overlooked.

"Bad luck took another slap at the organization as it was moving into Johnstown Thursday. A truck carrying two elephants overturned. The pachyderms were not in injured but the truck was bent out of shape."

A week later the Billboard continued the blowdown story and other events on the Pennsylvania tour stating that within a few hours after the blowdown Clawson had made arrangements for more sailmakers to be at Harrisburg where the show was contracted for a two day stand. Soon after arrival there the big top was ready to be raised. The first day gave a half afternoon house and capacity at night. The second afternoon found a 46 mile per hour wind hitting the city. Beatty and Clawson ordered the performance stopped and people were requested to leave. The peaks were lowered and little damage resulted. Radio time was used at Harrisburg to inform stub holders that they would be admitted at the night performance or a refund would be given.

At York a late matinee provided a capacity crowd and there was a big night house. The show had a bad lot in Lancaster far from the center of the city, with poor transportation. Business for the two day stand was about 12,000. On May 25

the show was in Lebanon where a hard downpour all day resulted in light business

Using the Central Park lot between Bethlehem and Allentown on May 28-30 the show had good business at all but the opening matinee. It is interesting to note that the season route sheet listed Bethlehem for May 28 and Allentown for the 29th and 30th.

Allan King and Joe Juta arrived from Los Angeles, and were added to the big top staff. A. B. (Red) Ball also joined and was placed in charge of the front door.

The article noted all along the Pennsylvania route the newspapers and radio stations had given the show plenty of space and air time. It said that opposition from two other shows had been experienced at Greensburg, Johnstown, Altoona, Harrisburg, York and Bethlehem with brigades putting up plenty of wait paper. One show's brigade did its work fair, no pulling or covering. The other crew seemed more intent on covering and pulling Beatty paper than heralding the coming of its own outfit.

The opposition circuses were not mentioned in the article but they were Cole Bros. and Bailey Bros. The Bailey show was in ahead of Beatty and Cole came ten days later. The heavy showing of wait paper was by the Cole show.

Beatty returned to New Jersey for a two day stand at Camden, June 6-7. On June 7 the Camden *Courier-Post* printed a review and three large photographs.

"High praise given to Beatty's Circus.

"It's new, different, fast moving, clean and the kind of entertainment the whole family can enjoy.

'That's the opinion of this reviewer after more than two hours of enjoyment at the Clyde Beatty Circus and trained wild animal show, which closes its two-day engagement tonight at the East State Street grounds. The show moves to Had-

donfield for matinee and evening performances tomorrow and Saturday.

"Clyde Beatty, who holds the undisputed title of the world's foremost wild animal trainer, displays true showmanship in this, his first venture as a bigtime circus producer and owner.

"Beatty's circus can be called a cavalcade of the best of the American circuses dating back to the time of the immortal P. T. Barnum, through the cycle of years that produced Adam Forepaugh, the Sells-Floto circus, the Hagenback and Wallace big-top extravaganza with the unforgettable Poodles Hanneford, the greatest comedy bareback rider of all time; the John Sparks and John Robinson circuses and the greatest show in the world, Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey.

"Of course, the youthful Beatty and his attractive wife, Harriett, 'steal' the show. Beatty gives his usual thrilling and spinetingling performance with 20 trained but still ferocious lions and tigers in a massive steel cage.

"Any skeptics who take in the circus with the idea these denizens of the jungles are a lot of tired, underfed and doped beasts will be sadly disillusioned.

"Armed with a chair, bullwhip and a revolver loaded with blank cartridges, Beatty actually taunts the beasts into a roaring and raging exhibition. One giant lion tried to grab the whip with his teeth.

"One 'cat' is made to perform like a whirling dervish and also to roll over and over at commands from his master.

"Beatty's young blonde help-mate demonstrates her own talent as a wild animal trainer with a tiger riding an elephant's back and jumping through two large rings of fire.

Jack Joyce during the menage number in the open air following the blow down. Pfening Archives.





The Beatty white ticket wagon after it was in a wreck on June 3 on the way to Chester, Pennsylvania. John Van Matre photo.

'The Flying Escavitas, aerial artists from Mexico, present a sensational demonstration of flying from trapezes. One stunt consists of a triple body spin in midair. The exhibition is breathtaking.

"Beatty's famous liberty horses are one of the highlights of the show. They dance, cakewalk and do many clever stunts. The animal comedy motif is offered by Mickey and Minnie, educated chimpanzees, featured in two of Beatty's wild animal motion picture stories made in Hollywood. Capt. Albert Fleet is their trainer.

"Other features include trained dogs and ponies skillfully handled by Martha Joyce, Tarzan, plank walking lion, and trained bears, handled by Capt. Cramer; hand balancing and juggling by Bettina and Rosa; Don Juan and the Craigs; Pauline Penny and the McIntosh Sisters, tight wire walkers; Jean Evans and Grace McIntosh trapeze artists. The girls are pretty and talented.

"Other features are an all-girl aerial ballet, nine [the reporter miscounted] elephants trained and directed by Bert Petus, the Don Pablo Troupe and the Wilsons, acrobats. One team of clowns tops off their many skits with a hilarious comedy stunt aided by a balky mule. Cowboys and cowgirls complete the bill with trick and fancy riding.

"Merritt Belew, a veteran of 35, years under the canvas, is ringmaster. The musical score is ably done by Vic Robbins' band.

"The Clyde Beatty Circus has eliminated the usual ballyhoo, games of chance and grifters."

Camden was followed by two days in Haddonfield, three in Trenton, and a single day in Asbury Park. After three more one day stands in New Jersey the show moved into New York at Middletown on June 25.

While at Trenton, New Jersey, three cubs were born to Primba, the elephant

riding tigress in the Harriett Beatty act. This cancelled the act for that day and then Mrs. Beatty became sick. She was ordered by a physician to take a week's rest and then have a thorough physical checkup.

Troubles continued to follow the show into New Jersey. The June 30 Billboard reported,

"New Jersey unkind to Clyde Beatty roll.

"The show had moved into Clifton for a three day weekend stand that concluded the Jersey tour and the management was happy to kiss the state good-bye. It had been anything but kind financially."

At Elizabeth on May 20 Neil Paul, 41, an elephant man, was crushed against a truck when the herd moved unexpectedly during watering. He was taken to a local hospital with a fractured clavicle.

However sour the New Jersey route had been the final date at Clifton was a big winner as good weather upped the attendance. Continuous inclement weather had seriously affected business during the June stands. The show remained in the black as a result of a big spring. There was hope for increased crowds in New York. Morristown on May 21 provided a capacity matinee, but as customers poured on the lot for the night show rain hit and the evening performance was washed out.

Changes in personnel were frequent all season and Hal Oliver left the press department in Morristown. It was reported that Verne Williams had resigned as Cole Bros. advance car manager and moved to Beatty to take over the advance department.

The late John Van Matre visited the show several times as it played through eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey, witnessing the troubled times. He stated Beatty had said at the time he never wanted another truck show and indicated a

switch to rails might be forthcoming.

It seemed at the conclusion of the Jersey trek the show was moving alright and setting up on time. The show abandoned its policy of playing numerous multi-day stands as the New York tour began a string of thirty-nine one day dates.

After New York appearances at Middletown, Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Kingston and Hudson the show played a single stand in Massachusetts at Pittsfield on May 30. This was the only New England stand of the season. The show returned to New York at Saratoga Springs and stayed in the state through Olean on July

The *Billboard* reported that Beatty's business on the New York tour had been reminiscent of the early season stands in the Carolinas and Virginia. Amsterdam on July 4 was profitable as were a number of others. Also reported was a return to eastern Ohio, but the show would forgo plans to move into the middle west for an early return to the southland before the industrial money ran out.

In the dressing room gossip section of the July 14 *Billboard* Ray Dean wrote that Art Miller, general agent, was back on the show in Saratoga Springs for a conference with Beatty and Clawson. Tex Sherman had been back that day for a meeting regarding new promotional advance work. The Powell Troupe, a wire walking act, arrived to replace Paulene Penny who had been injured in Clifton, New Jersey,

Dean noted that Dave and Deacon McIntosh had the rolling stock in good shape. Walter Rogers and his carpenters were building bodies for recently purchased trucks. Merritt Belew, equestrian director, had the show clicking in one hour and forty-five minutes. Ralph Clawson had spent several days with the advance department and reported that the enlarged billing crew and new paper would be used after July 10.

After New York came four days in western Pennsylvania at Bradford, Warren, Oil City and Sharon, a quick move into Ohio at East Liverpool and then back into the Keystone state to play McKeesport and Uniontown.

Billboard coverage was minimal but it was reported the business upswing in New York had held up on the return trip through Pennsylvania. Warren, Bradford

The big top canvas semi on July 2, 1945. Art Gunther photo.



and McKeesport had been profitable. Allen King left the show in Pennsylvania.

The July 21 *Billboard* in a general article told how the nation's press had spoken favorably of the circuses currently on tour and gave the Beatty show as an example of how the shows had been treated. The Olean, New York *Times-Herald* review of the show's stand on July 10 was quoted: "Local comment was excellent about the cleanliness of the circus performers, their fine appearance and attitude in contacting the public. The same goes for the upkeep of the grounds and equipment. Animals were finely trained and well groomed."

Two full houses came at Uniontown on July 18 and then the show moved into West Virginia at Morgantown, where business was only fair. Parkersburg on July 23 provided a strong afternoon crowd and a full one at night. Moving into Ohio for a single stand at Gallipolis July 24 the afternoon show was called off because of a late arrival due to a truck accident. The night performance there drew a capacity house.

While in Ohio it was announced that Jack B. Austin had taken over the bill car two week earlier and the advance had perked up. This suggests that the earlier report of Verne Williams being on the bill car was not correct.

Next came a sixteen stand tour of Kentucky beginning at Ashland on July 25. The following day at Morehead was the hottest day of the season and kept the afternoon crowd to a minimum, but a full house turned out that night. On July 27 the show was in Maysville where it was reported to be the first circus in five years. Two full houses turned out despite hot weather. At the matinee flyer Raymond Escavites was knocked unconscious when he missed the bar and landed near the corner of the net. He was revived and worked the night show.

An August 18 *Billboard* article was headlined, "Kentucky gives Beatty winning biz for 16 days.

The Beatty stringer and ring curb semi in Glen Falls, New York. Art Gunther photo.

'The show handicapped by labor shortages and late matinees was winding up a successful sixteen day stay and was heading into Illinois and Missouri."

The article written by Murray Powers of the Akron Beacon-Journal and

a representative of the *Billboard* who had spent several days on the show as a guest of side show manager Duke Drukenbrod.

The article reported the show was getting particularly strong night houses, but the matinees that started as late as 4:50 kept the afternoon crowds down. The show had a strong performance with Beatty doing his usual excellent job of selling his cat act, in spite of an injured right hand in a cast.

The show had encountered several highway mishaps in making the long jump from Mount Sterling to Frankfort. George Foster of the white wagon lost his trailer and narrowly escaped injury.

Drukenbrod's side show, with a strong line-up of attractions, was pulling in the crowds. Midget Jenny Reynolds had returned to her home in Chattanooga.

The show played to unusually strong houses in Glasgow, Bowling Green and Madisonville, with the later providing a turnaway for the night show on August 9.

The article concluded by stating that Tunis (Eddie) Stinson, manager of the Detroit Shrine circus for 25 years, was joining the Beatty show in an executive capacity the following week.

The same *Billboard* carried an advertisement for lithographers. The ad also said, "will send ticket if I know you, lush heads buy round trip ticket." Those interested were to wire Jack Austin at four towns in Missouri.

The August 25 Billboard carried an ar-

ticle on truck versus rail transportation. The Beatty show was given considerable comment with the sub-heading reading, "Beatty gives mud real try. New show makes sked by Herculean effort but owner in doubt over future."

It was mentioned that, "the circus was getting a terrific test by attempting to move such a large show on motor ve-



Side show semi on the Beatty lot in Glen Falls. Art Gunther photo.

hicles. Beatty had been advised by many that his show was 'too big' for the category, but it can be readily seen that he has a big chunk of money tied up in his trucks and that the near super-human efforts of Dave and Alec (Deacon) McIntosh his chief mechanics and their helpers the show moves every day. There are more than 100 moving motor pieces. The show now in its 19th week of the season is currently enjoying hefty receipts, but the owner hasn't decided yet to switch over to rails, though patiently listing the pros and cons. It was pointed out that many Beatty staffers have rail show experience and department heads and key workers formally with railers out number the truckers two to one."

Henderson on August 11 was the final Kentucky date, and afterwards the show went into Illinois to play Frankfort, Murphysboro, Centralia, Belleville, and Alton.

At Alton on August 17 four armed bandits robbed the ticket wagon of \$15,000. The FBI moved in on the case and stayed until arrests were made a few weeks later.

On August 18 the Alton *Evening Telegraph* printed a front page article on the circus holdup.

"Loss of about \$15,000 cash was reported to police by officials of the Clyde Beatty circus early today after four bandits, who kidnaped circus employes in charge of its mobile ticket office, opened and rifled two small safes containing money accumulated to meet today's weekly payroll.

"According to the report given the police, armed bandits took charge of the ticket office trailer, drawn by a tractor unit, as it was about to start from the circus grounds at the old ball park, 1800 East Broadway, at 3:30 a. m., then forced two employes of the circus, and a United cab driver, to accompany them as it was driven by a circuitous route to the dump east of the Shell Oil refinery, where the two safes were broken open.





One of the three 1945 Beatty elephant semis. Art Gunther photo.

'The three men, made prisoner by the bandits, were trussed up with wire, and rope before the bandits drove off in their own car with the money.

'The robbery was reported to police at 5:10 a. m. after the three men left bound by the bandits worked loose from their bonds and drove back to the Alton police station

"Clyde Beatty, owner of the circus, was unable on first learning of the robbery to give a figure on the cash other than that the amount was several thousand dollars. Later, when he had conferred with Thomas K. Buchanan, circus attorney who travels with the show, an estimate of \$15,000 was given. The money, said Beatty, was uninsured. A large sum had been accumulated in cash, he explained, since payroll and other expenses were to have been paid today at St. Charles, Missouri where the circus moved from Alton after last night's performance. The circus had come to Alton after showing at Belleville, and was said to have played to a crowd of about 4000 yesterday.

"Included in cash taken,' said Buchanan, after he and Beatty made hurried

One of the four Beatty cage trucks built in 1940 for the Hamid-Morton tour. Art Gunther photo.

examination of the looted safes and office-trailer, 'was money that would have been applied to paying the federal tax on yesterday's receipts and payroll income tax deductions. The bandits, however, carefully sifted through contents of the strong boxes and left behind all

checks, including some already drawn for the Internal Revenue Service in settlement of taxes due on performances earlier in the week' said Buchanan. 'Evidently they sought to avoid any theft that would call for federal action.'

"Report of the robbery to the police was made by Walter Rogers, 34, circus mechanic, and Thomas McMahon, 44, circus transportation chief, and Lewis Bobo, 602 St. Louis Avenue. East Alton, all of whom had been kidnapped by the bandits.

"According to the narration given, Rogers, who was to drive the ticket-office outfit to St. Charles, was reclining in the seat of the tractor-cab awaiting return of McMahon who had gone to an all night lunch room on Broadway near Washington. Rogers heard a sound at the door, glanced up to see it jerked open, and found he was looking into the muzzle of a pistol. Then the other door was opened, and a second man with a weapon appeared. They climbed in. One took the wheel, and the other, keeping his revolver pointed at Rogers, ordered him to shift the gears as he sat between the two.

"When the ticket office had gone a block from the old ball park to Washington, the driver turned north. McMahon, coming from the lunch room, saw it moving up Washington hill. He thought Rogers had taken the wrong direction on Route 140, called a nearby taxi under

charge of Bobo and directed him to overtake the ticket office so he could get it headed back towards St. Charles.

"Just as the cab pulled abreast of the ticket wagon so McMahon could shout 'You're going the wrong way,' a black sedan ahead of the ticket wagon slowed until abreast of the cab.

"An armed man dropped out and took charge of the cab, forcing Bobo to follow the ticket wagon while he held both the driver and McMahon under his pistol. The bandit's sedan resumed the lead, and the procession of three vehicles was driven through Upper Alton and thence over Route 140 and Wood River township roads to the Shell dumping grounds, east of the refinery, not far from Wanda.

'There the bandits informed the circus men they were prepared to use explosives to open the ticket office and safes, but preferred not to injure anyone. They inquired if anyone was riding in the office trailer. The circus employes opened the office to assure no one was asleep there.

'The bandits then went to work on the small safes, opening them after knocking off the combinations. One was attached to the office floor and was worked on there. The other was carried out onto the dumping ground. The circus men told police they believe both safes would have been blown had the bandits been unable quickly to open them.

"After the cash had been secured, the bandits bound the three kidnapped victims with some heavy leather straps, secured in the ticket office, also some wire and rope, in such fashion it took them a few minutes to unloose themselves. The bandits took the keys from the taxicab. Just before driving off, one bandit tossed out two \$5 bills to Rogers with a parting warning, 'Keep your mouth shut.' The three victims of the bandits were able to drive back to Alton after the circus mechanic managed to get the taxicab started without the use of a key.

"Deputy sheriff Mike Hall was called as police investigation was launched and the circus owner and attorney were located. They, with other circus men, drove to the Shell tract to bring back the ticket office, then have it moved to St. Charles.

"On return to the police station, Buchanan related how he had learned from another circus man that the ticket office outfit was seen to turn north in Washington after leaving the grounds, about 3:30 a.m. He, too, he said, supposed the driver had mistaken directions at the state route junction at Broadway and Washington. He drove out over Route 140, east of Upper Alton, in an effort to overtake it and have it turn back, not suspecting at the time there had been a kidnapping. From a police patrolman in Upper Alton,



he said, he had learned the circus office outfit had gone east on the state route, two other cars near it, but this information had not caused, him at the moment to suspect a robbery.

"Beatty termed the robbery just one more bit of bad luck that had followed him this season. Rains have interrupted performances; twice windstorms caused damage to his equipment, one blowing down the big top, and one bad traffic accident occurred as the circus was moving. A flying trapeze act had to be omitted from last night's performance, one of the aerialists, the 'catcher,' having suffered a broken finger. Beatty himself recently broke his right arm when he fell during his wild animal act, in which he handles, more 'cats' than are used in any other single act in the world. Then he shrugged off the robbery as 'just one thing more,' and affirmed the show would go on, as scheduled today at St. Charles.

"Beatty, who winters his circus at Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, where he operates a winter zoo, acquired the tent show last fall. Buchanan said that Rogers, circus mechanic first to be made prisoner of the bandits, is a son of Ray Rogers, who owned and operated the circus until 1943. 'Rogers,' Beatty interjected, 'literally grew up with this circus.'

'Thomas McMahon, the transportation chief, has been for about 12 years with the circus, first under Rogers' management, later when a syndicate operated the show in 1944, and now with Beatty."

The show continued on its regular route going into Missouri the following day at St. Charles where the lot was a mile or more out of town, but it didn't stop the people from attending. After Hannibal the show played Moberly on August 21 where hot weather held down the matinee crowd, but a full house turned out for the night performance.

Beatty had been working for the prior two weeks with his right hand in a cast. He had suffered a fractured hand while trying to break up a fight between a lion

and a tiger.

Other Missouri stands came at Columbia, Jefferson City, Washington, Crystal City-Festus, Cape Girardeau, Sikeston, Poplar Bluff, and Kennett. At the twin cities Crystal City-Festus on August 25 Duke Drukenbrod, side show manager and an associate of Beatty for several years, suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized in St Louis. At the same time it was also reported in the September 8 Billboard that manager Ralph Clawson was seriously ill and at first it was believed he too had suffered a heart attack, but this later proved to be false. Rumors flew fast, one being that Art Miller, general agent, had been called to a conference

with Beatty and the advance crew had been ordered to stand by. The most significant rumor was that Beatty, rather than trying to carry on alone. would close the show and return to winterquarters and prepare for his winter dates and the 1946 season. The Billboard article said

business was steady through the Missouri despite considerable opposition paper. Matinees generally ran light, but nights had been strong enough to show a profit. It was reported that the show was ahead in the neighborhood of \$80,000 on the season. In the same issue the show advertised for billposters and lithographers.

A week later it was reported that Duke Drukenbrod was still seriously ill but there was no definite word on Clawson, other that he was not on the lot. Norman Carroll became side show manager for the rest of the season.

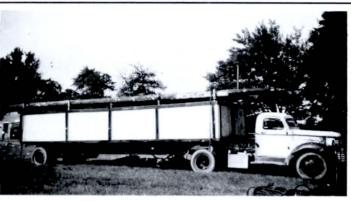
The show moved into Arkansas on August 31 at Blytheville where the matinee crowd was termed okay with a full one on hand at night. Jonesboro the next day brought two strong houses. A real red one came in Little Rock on Labor Day, September 3. With ideal weather Beatty played to a full house at the matinee and then strawed them at the night show. Other Arkansas dates were at Hot Springs, Malvern, Pine Bluff, Camden, El Dorado, and Crossett, A tour of Mississippi then began at Cleveland on September 17.

The September 22 Billboard finally cleared up the mystery of Clawson's illness in an article headed, "Clawson, Beatty both get well as Arkansas yields heavy \$ crop.

"Ralph Clawson reported seriously ailing two weeks ago said at Greenville, Mississippi that both he and Beatty 'got well' before they crossed the Mississippi from Arkansas. Clawson denied rumors

of a heart ailment but conceded that a bad cold kept him off the lot for a day. 'The show,' he said, 'had raked it on its tour of Arkansas.'

Two packed tents made Hot Springs a stand-out stand. The matinee crowd hung around two hours after starting time when a late arrival, do to truck



The big top pole wagon was one of two unlettered trucks on the 1945 show. Art Gunther photo.

troubles, delayed the performance. Clyde Beatty returned to Hot Springs the following day to reclaim a two-month old tiger cub that escaped from one of the trucks. The cub was found by a farmer, but not before its escape had touched off a "wild animal hunt" by police and re-

Moving into the southern part of the state, the Beatty show again filled the big top at El Dorado for the night performance on September 8, though the matinee was light.

Greenville, Mississippi was given only a two-day press treatment, but even that didn't appear to hurt, for there was an overflow house for the night show after a three-quarter matinee.

Beatty next played Vicksburg and then followed the first two day stand in many weeks at Jackson on September 13-14. Other stands in the state were at Kosciusko, Cleveland, Clarksdale, Greenwood, Yazoo City, Brookhaven, Natchez, McComb, Columbia, Hattiesburg and Gulfport. Business proved to be strong all through the Magnolia State. The September 29 Billboard headed its coverage, "Beatty bats em' out on tour of ole Miss."

The article noted that the cotton crop was late but Mississippi pickings were

The 1945 Clyde Beatty Circus red ticket wagon. Fred Pfening photo.



right for the Beatty circus, turnaways and straws making it a banner tour.

Another huge crowd came from six counties at Greenwood on September 19 to give the show two jam-packed houses, both matinee and night performances requiring straw. This high level attendance began at Jackson when two overflow crowds attended on the 14th and continued at Cleveland, both afternoon and night, with several hundred turnaways marking the night

The gross was off a bit at Clarksdale on September 18, probably due to a week stand by the Cavalcade of Amusements that had closed three days earlier. The Beatty brigade found the city and area heavily papered by the carnival. Transient and black attendance was also below par because the cotton-picking money was not yet in circulation.

Clearly the good business the show had in Arkansas and Mississippi was the best of the season to date. Only the very early takes were equal. The circus moved into Mobile, Alabama for a two day stand on September 29-30 to finish out the month but immediately came back to Mississippi to play Laurel, Meridian, Macon and Columbus.

The Billboard again headlined, "Beatty draws 'em on Mississippi Tour.

"Clyde Beatty and his troupers had been coining money on a swing through Mississippi despite the fact that the weather wasn't the best in a few slots, the show played to full or straw houses in three out of four cities."

Playing Laurel on October 1 the show ran into tough weather in the afternoon, the day being threatened. As a result the matinee crowd was slim. The weather cleared in early evening and the night show was packed.





This half sheet poster is typical of the eighteen styles used by the Beatty show in 1945. Pfening Archives.

Gulfport turned out a strong crowd for the matinee and had a capacity night house. With perfect weather at Hattiesburg the show registered straw houses. After a fair matinee the show played to a full night one at Columbus, with the rain holding off until just a few minutes before the performance

Duke Drukenbrod making a side show opening on May 28. Bob Good photo.



As the first circus to play Natchez in twenty-five years Beatty attracted two strong houses. Children of the three Natchez orphanages were guests at the

Beatty, after making a thorough tour of Mississippi, moved out of the state for good and entered Alabama at Tuscaloosa on October 5. Other Alabama stands were at Demopolis, Selma, two days at Montgomery, Troy, Eufaula and Dothan. At Selma on October 8 the show had a strong matinee and jammed 'em for the night show. En route here one of the trucks carrying Beatty's wild animals crashed into a guard rail. A door of the truck swung open and a lion and two tigers escaped. The driver drove the tigers back into their cage. It was a different story, however, with the lion. By chance, two passing cowboys, not attached to the circus, happened along and they caught the animal by lassoing it.

The October 2 Billboard said that the Beatty circus would close its season at Dublin, Georgia on October 25, and would go into winter quarters at Macon, Georgia. This was a surprise announcement as Macon had never fig-

ured in the speculation of the quarters site. Before the announcement both York and Fort Lauderdale had been rumored as the winter destination.

A week and a half of Georgia dates concluded the season's route. After the final stand in Alabama at Dothan on October 13 the show moved into the Peach state at Thomasville, which was followed by Moultrie, Valdosta, Tiffon, and Waycross, making a rapid move across the southern part of Georgia. A two day stand at Savannah came on October 22-23 and was followed by a one dayer at Statesboro, followed by the closing stand in Dublin on October 25.

The season was succinetly summed up by Ray Dean in a November 15, 1945 letter to Canton, Ohio circus fan Ted Deppish: "While our season was one filled with about every known grief, this coupled with labor shortage, yet, I believe the show came in with a good profit and Clyde deserves a lot of credit.

The November 3 Billboard said the advance which had finished the season's work six days before the closing had scattered. Jack Austin, manager, flew to Phoenix, Arizona and Art Miller, general agent, was scheduled to return to Wisconsin. A report on the Georgia stands said the show had enjoyed playing to full houses on both days in Savannah.

Following the close in Dublin the trucks were stored in a large garage and parking area in Macon until the close of the Georgia State Fair on November 2. The equipment was then moved to Central City Park, site of the fair, where winterquarters were established.

Charles Sparks, retired circus owner, whose Sparks railroad circus and Downie Bros. motorized show, had formerly wintered there, assisted Ralph Clawson and Paul M. Conway, the show's attorney, in making arrangements with city officials for the location. It was announced that Clyde and Harriet Beatty would leave

soon for the Houston Shrine circus, taking twelve trucks loaded with with cats, elephants and props.

The October 27 Billboard carried an advertisement offering equipment for sale which announced to the circus world that the Clyde Beatty motorized circus would soon be a thing of the past.

The ad offered for sale: "One 110 foot round top with three 40 middles; one 60 foot round top with four 30 foot middles; one 50 foot round top with three 20 foot middles; one practically new marquee, 30 x 35 feet; twenty-four

sections of blues, eight high, complete, jacks, stringers, new this season; twelve lengths of grandstand 12 high; eight lengths, eight high, complete with platforms and jacks; twenty-five 1 1/2 ton Chevrolet tractors and trailers, some snub nose; six International 1 1/2 ton tractors; six Dodge two ton tractors and three 25 KW light plants." All property could be seen as per route in the *Billboard* or at the Macon, Georgia Fairgrounds, after October 25. Responses were to Clyde Beatty Circus, Central City Park, Macon, Georgia.

A study of the the ad provides a fairly complete listing of the physical properties of the 1945 Clyde Beatty Circus. There was no listing of the 130 foot round top which was bought from Conklin and was later in the blowdown. Possibly it was held out for future use or was in such bad shape its sale value was gone.

The November 11 *Billboard* said, "Jack Joyce who had recently been discharged by the army headed the Beatty unit which left for the Houston and Fort Worth, Texas indoor dates. The unit consisted of elephants, horses, ponies, chimpanzees, the Flying Esquedas, Flo McIntosh, Jean Evans, Albert Fleet, Bert Petus and several clowns. At conclusion of these dates the elephants were to be returned to Macon. It was reported that Ben Davenport, owner of Dailey Bros. Circus and Jake Mills of

Mills Bros. Circus were visitors at the closing stand in Dublin." Possibly they were there to look over the property offered for sale.

Two weeks later the *Billboard* advised the Beatty show was settled in permanent quarters in Macon with a skeletonized crew until January 1 when repair work would begin and plans for the 1946 season would be finalized. Clyde Beatty and



The Beatty equipment being repainted in the King Bros. winter quarters in Hartford, Kentucky on March 20, 1946. Pfening Archives.

several performers, and twelve trucks of animals and props were expected back in Macon following the Texas Shrine dates at the end of November.

The December 22 Billboard said, "A gang of Chicago bandits has been rounded up and admitted that they staged the holdup of the Beatty show at Alton, Illinois in August. Sgt. John Hanrahan of the Chicago Police Department said the gang operating in and around Chicago had perpetrated a series of robberies, principally of bookie joints, and at least three murders are charged against individual members."

The amount of money taken in the circus robbery was listed as \$12,000, a somewhat smaller figure than that given at the time.

Beatty still hadn't gone public with his plans for 1946 although it was widely speculated he would have a railroad show. It was reported that he had a chance to buy the Arthur Bros Circus rail equipment from Louis Goebel who had a lien on it, but declined to do so.

A week later the final *Billboard* of the year mentioned that it was widely rumored that Clyde Beatty and Art Concello, owner of the 15 car Russell Bros.

Circus, would ride the rails together in 1946 after merging their shows.

This rumor turned into reality. Beatty and his animals became a part of Concello's show. The title was changed to Clyde Beatty Circus and the fifteen car railer hit the road when the new circus season rolled around. Concello owned the circus and the financial arrangement was similar to that between him and Beatty in 1944. The show went on a cross Canada

tour in 1946 in one of all time most profitable circus seasons.

In 1947 Beatty bought the show from Concello who joined forces with John Ringling North and Ringling-Barnum later in the year.

Beatty constructed four new railroad show type cages to house his lions and tigers for the 1946 season and the former truck cages were sold.

Floyd King, and his new partner Harold Rumbaugh, purchased the Clyde Beatty truck show equipment for their new King Bros. Circus being

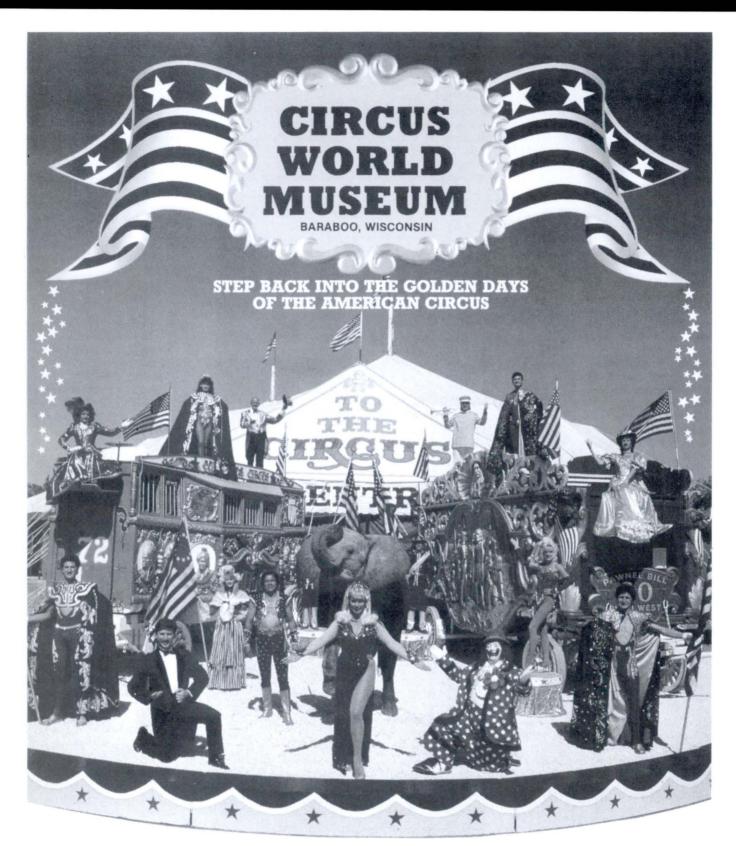
framed at Hartford, Kentucky. The property was moved from Macon to join that of the Bud Anderson Circus which had earlier been purchased by them. At least one of the former Beatty cage trucks went to the King show and was still there in early 50s. It was used to carry the side show band in the famed King street parades in the period 1952-55. One of the cage trucks was sold to the Mills show and it remained on that show for a few years.

The curtain now comes down on the 1945 Clyde Beatty motorized circus, the one and only season he ever owned and operated a truck show. The Clyde Beatty railroad circus prospered during the early years of its life and remained under Beatty's ownership until the early part of the 1956 season when it failed.

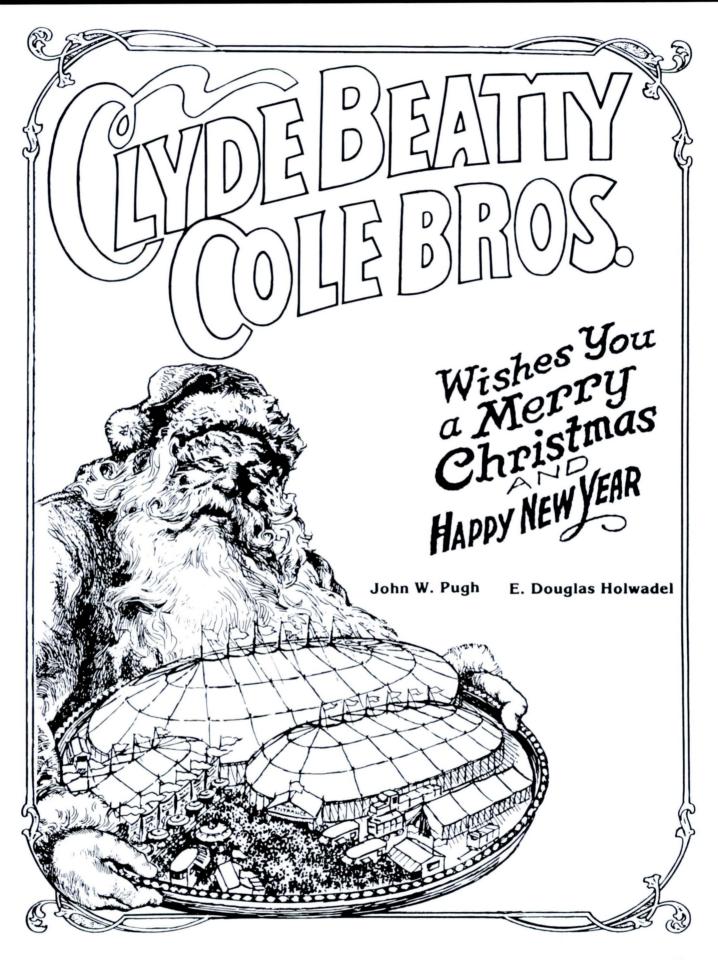
A syndicate consisting of Frank McClosky, Walter Kernan and Jerry Collins bought the show and reopened it in the late summer of 1956. After closing the short season the show was taken to Deland, Florida where it was converted to trucks for the 1957 season.

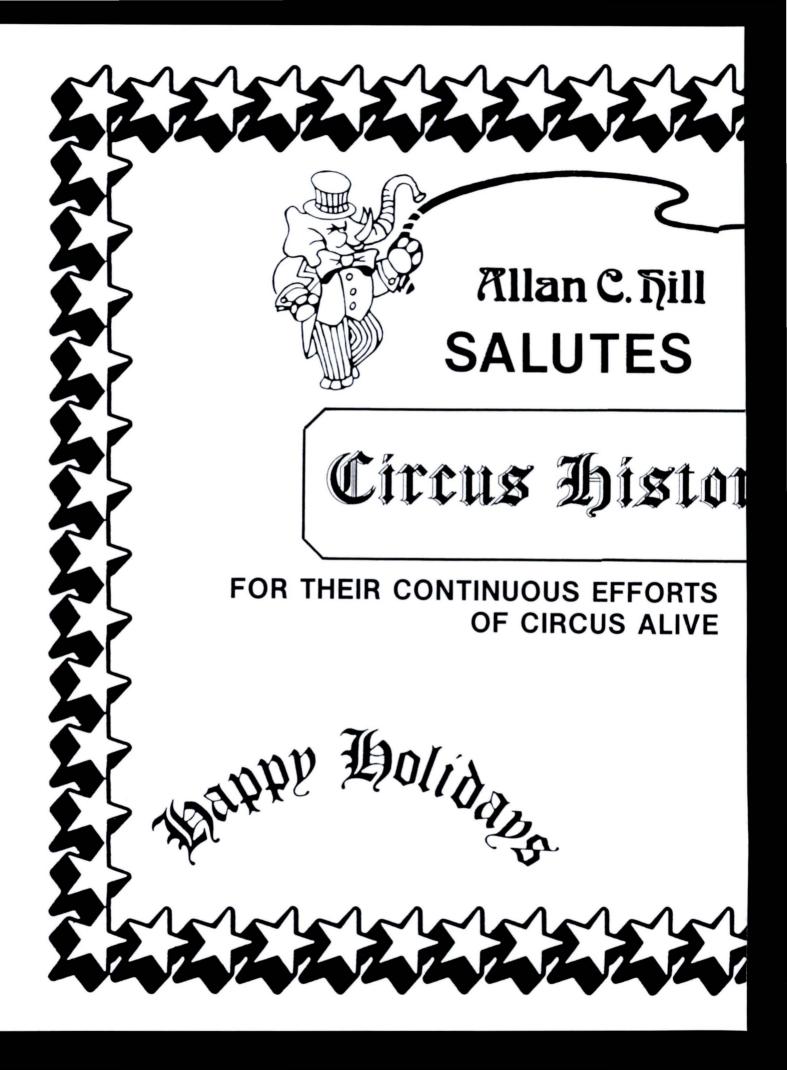
Beatty trouped with the show which bore his name until his death in 1965. The show, then using the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. title, continued and it is still on the

Some material used in this article came from the Pfening Archives.



## Season's Greetings!







Entertainment Corp.

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WATCH FOR
ALLEN C. HILL'S
GREAT AMERICAN
CIRCUS
IN 1991
BIGGER and BETTER
THAN EVER

everal myths have grown up concerning circus artists and in particular, circus standing riders. It is a general belief that all great bareback or pad riders originated in families that had recently come from foreign lands, notably from Europe. Also, it is believed that this unique art was learned from ancestors who were riders and that knowledge of the requisite skills was handed down in the family from generation to generation. Similiar to this idea is the erroneous notion that no individual was capable of teaching a particular skill who did not possess that skill himself.

All of these notions were refuted by members of this great family of riders, one of several American riding troupes. First of all their development as bareback riders was entirely American. The father, John Davenport, Sr., a famous singing and talking clown as well as gymnast, was a native of Savannah, Georgia, born on March 22, 1836.

At the age of 14 Davenport was apprenticed to John Robinson in his native city. He was incapable of becoming a principal rider, a career that would probably have been his first love, because of his very large stature and weight. John, while working as a ringmaster and comic vocalist, had been in close contact with great standing riders and had developed an appreciation and knowledge of their artistic skills. It was he who taught his children John, Jr., Albert, May, Orrin and Louise the art of principal and group riding in the old ring barns in Toledo, Ohio and Chicago and made all of them great and innovative performers. He was also the mentor of his brother in law, Orrin

Hollis, whom he coached as a principal somersault rider. Hollis was good enough to be signed by P. T. Barnum for the 1880 season.

It is true that Mme. John Davenport (nee Ella Hollis) had once been a pad rider. However, it was the father who was the foremost teacher of his children.

It has also been stated by some circus folk that all bareback riders were members of a few inter related families. Although thought is absolutely untrue, a superficial look at the ancestry of Orrin Davenport, Jr. might lead you to



believe that it was true. His father and mother were Orrin and Victoria Bedini Davenport. On his mother's side his grandparents were "Sir" Victor and Adele Hodgini Bedini. His great uncle was Orrin Hollis for whom his father was named. A first cousin was Melvin Hollis whose wife was Bessie Cooper Hollis. His uncles and aunts were Albert, Louise, May and John Davenport, Jr. and Flora and Walter Guice. His Aunt Louise was the wife of Reno McCree, Sr. All of these individuals were good riders and most of them were great artists.

Early in 1929 there could have been no brighter career prospects for a young bareback rider in America than those of 21 year old Orrin, Jr. With the rich heritage that has just been cited, he was developing into a finished rider who had already appeared on Hagenbeck Wallace and was now performing in the family act on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey at Madison Square Garden. Then tragedy

John Davenport, Sr., on left, John Davenport, Jr. and Jules Turnour on Burr Robbins around 1886. Pfening Archives.

struck when he broke his knee cap in a jump up while substituting for his father, who was out of the act due to influenza. After a period of healing, Orrin, Jr. rejoined the act in October and continued with it until late in 1931 when he suffered another debilitating injury.

There is no record of any circus performers in the ancestory of John L. Davenport. As a youth he was attracted to the old Savannah Theatre, where he did odd jobs and, at the age of 10, had a child's part in the play "The Stranger."

And so, in 1850, when Robinson & Eldred came to his home town, he apprenticed himself to the management and began what was to lead to a lifetime career with the circus.

In exchange for making himself generally useful, he received basic training which made him adept at performing on the perch and the trapeze as well as doing equestrian scenic and hurdle acts. However, it became apparent before long that his most natural performing talent would eventually be that of the talking and singing clown and ringmaster.

By 1852 he was on Spalding & Rogers Circus, a show that travelled from town to town both by wagon and also on the "Floating Palace" on the Mississippi, eventually going all the way south to New Orleans for the winter season.

Although as a performer he was denied his first choice, which was equestrianism, by 1858 he had built his first ring barn at Newport, Kentucky, and he began training horses and circus riders in the off season. John Davenport had been impressed by the methods used by both Charles J. Rogers and Omar Richardson for the

training of horses and the instruction of apprenticed riders. During his early career as a clown, he looked forward to the future when he could embark on a program for preparing principal equestrians.

In the meanwhile, in 1860 his prominence as a performer was such that he was engaged by the Great United States Circus owned by Seth B. Howes and Joseph Cushing for its tour of Great Britain. He was there until the fall of 1863, first with this Amerorganization performing in the larger cities



and eventually with British shows which toured the more remote regions. From this latter experience he learned how the children were trained by their parents to become respected family members and performers.

On returning to the United States in 1863 he joined Robinson & Howes Champion Circus in Chicago. On Thanksgiving Eve it opened as a winter circus in a building erected on Washington Street and continued there until April 15, 1864. What a cast of performers it presented! In addition to John Davenport (clown) it featured, among others, John Glenroy (reputedly the first per-

son to turn a somersault on a running bareback horse), William Dutton (four horse rider), James Robinson (bareback rider), Albert Aymar (clown), Luke Rivers (acrobat and clown), Dan Castello (clown), Francis Castello (rider), John Batcheler (leaper and tumbler), Henry North (gymnast and adopted son of Levi North) as well as Frank J. Howes (ringmaster) and his wife Marie (rider).

Davenport continued on this show during the summer and winter of 1864 and returned to John Robinson's Circus, called the Great Union Combination, in 1865. As a singing clown, particularly when the show remained in one location all winter, he had to have new material, preferably pertinent material to the location of the show. For many years he employed professional writers to produce this copy. He was also one of the few clowns permitted to sell songsters that contained jokes and the words of the songs that he sang in the show. Such sales might net him as much as \$50 per week.

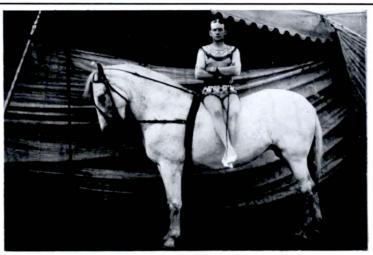
All this while Davenport became very knowledgeable in the three performing elements of the one ring circus: ringmaster, equestrian and clown.

Again in 1866 he was associated with F. J. Howes when his J. L. Dav-

enport's Great English Circus was part of Howes Great Consolidated Circus.

In 1867 Davenport moved to Toledo, Ohio and in 1873 he built his second ring barn there. Meanwhile in 1869 he fell in love with and married Ella Hollis, a pad rider who also did the concert specialties of song and dance as well as play the banjo. After their marriage they performed together on circuses for 15 years.

During the winters Davenport trained ring horses, managed theaters in Toledo and remained as busy as in the summer season



Albert M. Davenport on Campbell Bros. Circus in 1907. Pfening Archives.

under canvas. The crash of 1873 brought him severe losses, \$30,000 in real estate alone. However, he remained in Toledo until 1883 when he sold out and moved to Chicago. During this time he trained several riders including Orrin M. Hollis, his fifteen year old brother in law, with whom he signed on the F. Dunham Show in 1875. As clown and ringmaster, he continued with Hollis on Sells Bros. for 1878 and 1879, constantly polishing him as a top rider.

Next he began to train his sons John, Jr. and Albert M. In the winter of 1884 Ella rode in a carrying act with her brother Orrin on the Tom Grenier Circus. After that engagement she retired from the ring to preside over her household and share in the training of her five children as principal riders. A sixth child, a daughter Bertha, was a non professional.

In 1884 John began a period of some

Orrin Davenport somersaulting from one horse to another on Forepaugh-Sells in 1907. Pfening Archives.



four years on Burr Robbins Circus as ringmaster and clown. He also helped his two oldest sons improve their skills in equestrianism as they rode on the show, at least through 1886. The course of training was physically rigorous dancing, tumbling and balancing as they built strong and supple bodies and developed the abilty to do bareback somersault principal riding.

A principal rider was a single or solo standing rider. The art was learned by the use of the riding me-

chanic, a device that saved the rider. when he slipped, from falling to the ring. He was supported, if he slipped, by a turning right angular crane to which he was attached by a harness and rope, the other end of the rope being held by an attendant in the ring. By the use of this mechanic a pupil was taught the difficult trick of the side seat, where in a seated position he clung to the side of the cantering horse, as well as the even more difficult forward and backward somersaults and pirouettes. In addition, there were the carrying acts and family acts involving as many as 4 or more horses and the bounding jocky act where the rider recurrently leaped from the ground to the horse and back to the ground again. Most riding acts also featured comic riding with plenty of bounding jockey work.

By 1889 John L. Davenport with his two sons was on Ringling Bros. Circus (see Table I). Both sons were fine principal riders. John excelled in the backward forward somersault (thrown forward while facing backwards). On being announced by the ringmaster, the trade mark of his entry to the ring was a forward somersault thrown over the horse. Albert M. or "Stick" featured fine forward som-

ersaults and pirouettes done over objects. He also rode in carrying and family acts.

John, Jr. began his career in 1878 on Sells Bros. Circus where both his father and his uncle, Orrin Hollis, were also appearing. As late as 1929 on Gentry Bros. Circus he was doing a riding turn with the Cottrells and an Indian riding display as well as presenting pony drills. In 1885 Master Johnny threw a somersault with the grace and ease of older riders. Eight years lat-

er he was a consummate principal somersault and bounding jockey rider and a good two horse rider. By 1897 he was a member of the first four jump up team to a single running horse and in 1901 he was breaking horses in all three rings, between performances for bareback principal acts. In the next year he did his first twisting forward somersault from one horse to another horse running in tandem. As his career continued into the 1920's, he presented liberty acts and rode in

the garland entry as well as in his excellent principal act. His career closed about 1929 when he was boss pony and horse trainer as well as a member of a riding troupe. He lived until April 6, 1947 (see Table II).

In 1879, at the age of 8, Albert debuted as a rider on two Shetland ponies on Burr Robbins Circus and continued to be active as a rider into the 1930 season on Al G. Barnes Circus (see Table II). By 1894 Albert did a fine principal and somersault riding act and was an accomplished leaper and tumbler. In 1897 he also did a double carrying act with his sister May and participated, in private, with his brother John, Sam Bennett and William De Van in the first simultaneous 4 jump up ever to a running horse. The next year he repeated this act in public at Madison Square Garden with his sister May, Sam Bennett and Oscar Lowande and also continued his principal and jockey acts. His 1899 presentations included participating with Oscar Lowande, William De Mott and Jim Kincade as one of four riders on four horses in one ring, trick riding, a principal somersault act and a bounding jockey act with May including simultaneous double forward and backward leaps from the ground to the back of a single horse.

In 1901 his simultaneous four jump up was with Fred Ledgett, Sam Bennett and Oscar Lowande. In the spring of 1902 he was practicing both backward and for-

ward somersaults and he appeared on Ringling Bros. Circus with his wife and with May as well as with Reno McCree. In 1910 he did a double jockey act with Cecile Lowande, a carrying act and manege riding. His family act included his wife Norma (not to be confused with Norma, daughter of Ben Davenport), as well as Everett and Fred Crandall and Koontz Bessie (sometimes billed as Bessie Davenport). In addition to his riding, by 1911 he was serving as equestrian



Orrin and Victoria Davenport, Billy Wallett and Oscar Lowande on Forepaugh-Sells in 1907. Pfening Archives.

director. On Yankee Robinson in 1913 he did the bounding jockey act with Bessie and was billed as the champion bareback rider of the world. Albert offered his act to the Ringling brothers in January 1914 for \$225 per week but was turned down because all positions on that show were then filled. For this amount he would have furnished two lady principal acts, a gentleman's principal act and a 3 person act with riding dog.

On the Marsh Davenport Circus, out for three weeks in October of 1917, he rode in full dress with Dallie Julian and Bessie Evans. George Gerber was the clown and ringmaster. This riding trio continued the next year on Coop & Lent. For 1919 and 1920 he had his family of 6 riders in South American on Santos & Artigas. In 1921 his riding partners were Dallie Julian and Effie Davenport. Freddie Freeman joined as riding comic in 1923 and appeared in the same role again in 1925. Mickey Freeman and Ella Linton (billed as Ella Davenport) also rode with the group in 1925. In June of that year Marion McCrea replaced Ella in the Dav-

Louise (Lulu) Davenport on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1908. Pfening Archives.



enport comedy riding act. Bernie Griggs was the riding comedian with the act in 1924.

In 1925 on Robbins Brothers there were 7 people in the act. Late in the season of 1926 Albert Davenport went to Al G. Barnes where he remained until his retirement in 1930 after a career of 50 years. At the time that he joined Barnes in September of 1926, Billie Mack and Mark Smith became part of the act.

By 1928 there were five people in his act including his wife Isabel Cummings and Alma Taylor. As late as November 1929 he was still breaking rosin back colts at his Baldwin Park, California home. He died on September 10, 1932, survived by a son George and a daughter Ella. Throughout his life, Albert had always carried his age very well and even at fifty he still had the same boyish face and smile that he had when he was a youngster.

His sister May became particularly skilled in backward riding as well as pirouettes from the knees and from feet to feet. She did these turns with characteristic style and grace. Appearing with her brother Albert, she started her career on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Brothers Circus in 1897 doing a statuesque bareback act that also featured dancing on the horse's back. The next year she was in both a principal and a carrying act (pas de deux) and also did the first four jump up on a horse in public at Madison Square Garden with Sam Bennett, Oscar Lowande and Albert. She was soon doing a double bounding jockey act with Albert and appeared as a petite and supposedly "European artiste" in dashing arenic novelties.

From 1901 until at least 1904 she rode a champion jockey and carrying act with her future brother in law, Reno McCree. In 1907 she appeared as "past mistress of horsemanship" in the same sort of double

riding turn with W. F. Wallet and for several years later with Olympia Konyot. In the meanwhile she also appeared in a triple riding act on Barnum & Bailey with her brother Orrin and his wife, Victoria Bedini. For a while in 1914 she rode on Hagenbeck Wallace with Joe Leitchel. Again she appeared in the riding act with Orrin and Victoria on Barnum & Bailey, this time through 1918, and then on Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey through 1921 when she closed her career. She

died in Chicago on June 5, 1939 at the age of 59. She was the wife of Bernie Mowatt of the Juggling Mowatts (see Table III).

In the decade of the 1890's John Davenport, Sr. continued to develop great riders at his establishment out on suburban West Madison Street. At this barn, among others, his pupils had included his daughters May and Louise as well as his son Orrin.

His wife Ella also remained busy making wardrobe ladies'principal dresses, performers' trunks and shirts as well as pumps, etc. All together she may have used a million spangles during those years in the manufacture of costumes.

In 1910 the Davenport ring barn was the only one in Chicago. It was known to virtually every circus rider in America. Here there were no gay trappings or radiant costumes. It was a place for hard, tiresome work which called for iron nerves, conditioned muscles and clear brains. Feats which were to seem so matter of fact when executed in the big top were rehearsed for months on end before the critical eyes of the master whose axiom was that perfection was always sought but was never completely attained.

The ring horses also had to be trained. A faultily trained horse could cause a serious or fatal accident. For instance, when a rider executed a forward somersault, a high percentage of rosin backs would shy, as natural a response as though there were a blow to the head. If such shying

should occur and the performer did not land squarely on the horse's back, the chances were that he would fall to the ring and sustain injuries even as serious as a broken neck. The horse must also maintain that steady pace of some 21 strides per one revolution of the 42 foot ring regardless of what was going on either around him in the tent or on his back. The reason for a different fast finish horse became apparent when one considered the consequences if a horse changed pace and suddenly shifted into a faster tempo from the slower one.

John L. Davenport, Sr., hale and hearty, was still presiding over his riding establishment at the age of 73. In appearance he might have passed for a man at least 10 years younger.

When Master Orrin had debuted on Walter J. McDonald's Combined Colossal Show in 1900, his father was there as ringmaster as well as coach for his son's riding performance. In July of 1901



Victoria Davenport in 1908. Pfening Archives.

when that show was attached, both went over to Sells & Gray Circus.

After a long life, John, Sr. died on February 3, 1916. His wife survived until July 25, 1934. She was then nearly 80 years of age.

When fifteen year old Orrin started his riding career at the turn of the century, he

Orrin and Victoria Davenport on the Barnum and Bailey Circus in 1908. Pfening Archives.



was already a somersault rider and Leo Blondin was clowning his act. Soon he was doing a variety of tricks that included leaping, tumbling and principal riding. By the age of eighteen he was also a bounding jockey rider. Three years later, when he married Victoria Bedini, he was doing a double riding act as well as a three horse act that was eventually to include his wife and his sister May.

In 1907, in addition to his double act, he was also featured in a four person bareback act that included Victoria, William H. Wallett and Oscar Lowande.

Working together, Oscar Lowande and Orrin taught themselves the horse to horse backward somersault. In 1908, in order to meet the competition of other good riding troupes, Orrin introduced on Barnum & Bailey the back somersault from one horse to the second and then to the third horse, all running in tandem, and then off to the ground. In his single acts he was doing hurdle riding, forward and backward somersaults over objects and one foot jump ups while standing backward to the horse.

Soon there was no act performed by anyone on horse back at that time that Orrin could not do. His execution of these difficult feats was done with a grace and skill that caused many to believe that he had received his training from the European masters.

Changes were coming to the art of standing riding and he sought to remain contemporary in all aspects. When larger riding groups were introduced, by the Konyots for example, Orrin built up his

act in 1909 to include four members, at least, in addition to himself. These were Laura Meers and Pat Valdo, Arthur Greenwood and Victoria. His sister May was also on Barnum & Bailey at that time. Laura and Pat were married in 1914 and Laura was with the Davenports as late as 1918.

Later, at various times, the Davenport riders included Bessie Castello, Lulu and May Davenport, Orrin, Jr., the clown Mickey McDonald, Ella Linton, Dorothy Siegrist Davenport, Laurence Swalley (as the happless candy butcher), Dorothy Emmonds and Rose Wallett. In 1930 when Orrin's European Circus appeared at the Jolson Theatre in New York City, there were four women in the act and two men. The ladies wore distended ballet skirts, raspberry pink in color, long backless bodices with gold spangles, elaborately dressed yellow mohair wigs with gold bands and Roman sandels covered with pink irridescent spangles.



In 1932, on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, Orrin's troupe of four riders included Lulu, Rose Wallett Kearns and Ella Linton as well as Orrin plus Orrin's wife Dorothy, as ringmistress. This act commanded a salary of \$325 per week, down \$75 from 1930.

As a bareback rider Orrin was the best of them all. In 1915, riding with 2 ladies, he did surprising leaps and bounds and concluded with the horse to horse somersault. He had accomplished this act on Barnum and Bailey several years previously. Around 1912 when May Wirth prevailed upon him to help her perfect the "back across," he complied and she beriding clown Poodles, with baggy pantsand many layers of coats, reintroduced comedy riding to America. He was so ef-fective that all riding acts soon employed a rider in a similar presentation to his. His greatness as a clown rider was that he always appeared so natural in his humor. His greatest tribute was that he was so widely imitated. In line with this trend, by 1919 Orrin had begun this type of clowning, a role that he continued until he retired from actively riding after the 1934 season. In the teen years Pat Valdo, as a white face August, had clowned the act, but he did not do the vigorous jockey riding, etc. that went with Orrin's later fast ensemble and acrobatic comedy riding.

In 1935 for a number of Shrine dates, Orrin directed two different riding acts each with five peole, one headed by the comedian Joe Hodgini and the other by Freddie Freeman. In 1937 he went over to Hagenbeck Wallace as ringmaster and presented the Hodgini-Davenport riding troupe which consisted of Joe, Etta and Tommy Hodgini, Ethel and Freddie Freeman, Rose Wallett and, for part of the season, Dorothy Davenport. For the next three years he presented the Davenport-Hodgini act at various Shrine dates and in 1940 was also ringmaster for a Davenport-Rieffenach riding troupe.

This view in the backyard of the Barnum show in 1917 included, left to right, John O'Brien, Poodles Hanneford, Elizabeth Hanneford, unknown soldier, Victoria Davenport, Mrs. Hanneford, Fred Derrick, Orrin Davenport and George Hanneford. Pfening Archives.

Besides his career as one of the greatest of all time bareback performers (see table IV), Orrin Davenport was also associated for many years with the production of Shrine circuses, reputedly beginning with the very first one given in Detroit, Michigan in 1906. The Moslem Temple in that year requested some acts for an indoor winter circus as a fund raising project. During the winter months Orrin soon became a performer-producer and later a premier producer of Shrine circuses. (see

table V). Eventually, much of the talent he recruited came, under a long standing agreement, from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. His season usually began in November and continued into the early spring with a break for the Christmas holiday season.

After his death in 1962, the Orrin Davenport Circus continued for a while under the direction of Mrs. Dorothy Davenport and Mrs. Grace McIntosh as coproducers.

The riding career of Louise (Lulu), the youngest child of John Davenport, Sr., extended from 1901 on Walter L. Main through 1936 on Cole Bros. Circus (see table IV). From the beginning she was very good at the jump-up and in 1904 and 1905 on Ringling Bros. she rode in an excellent two

person act with Orrin. By 1906 on Carl Hagenbeck she was doing a bounding jockey bareback act as well as a posing horse number. The next year she and her husband, Reno McCree, were working two horses at the Chicago training barn. From that time until 1916 on either Ringling Bros. or Hagenbeck-Wallace, the McCree-Davenport troupe was in the forefront with a triple jockey act and jumping dogs in the finish. Reno and Lulu regularly bounded from the ground to a standing position on the back of a horse running at full speed and Schepp, the dog, followed with a seemingly human intelligence. The troupe eventually numbered five and included Nettie Greer. Lulu also continued her principal act where she rode at times opposite Rose Trentini, Winnie Sweeney, Albert Hodgini (as Miss Daisy) or Josie Clarke.

Louise as a bareback rider was in a class by herself. By rightful heritage she was a graceful, young aristocrat of the sawdust ring. Aglow with health and beautiful in face and form, she dressed her act with rare good taste and her original costumes were especially pleasing to the ladies. Pavlowa was famous for exquisite grace and poetry in motion, but Louise, in her fascinating gowns, did the Russian dancer one better when she executed pirouettes and the "pas seul" and

The Davenport riding troupe on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1925. Left to right Orrin, Ella Linton, Dorothy Emerson, Lou Davenport and Orrin Davenport, Jr. Pfening Archives.



tripped lightly on her toes on the backs of swiftly moving steeds. She was also the originator and producer of new acts thatshe was always preparing in the winter for the coming season. She coached ladies who rode in a "Silas Green" act on Ringling Bros where she doubled as the old rube country woman. With the versatility of a great artist, she changed from a dainty young equestrienne dan-

seuse to a hick character and she made good in both roles.

A publicity article in Wilmington, Delaware newspaper on May 21, 1913 described her in this generous fashion: "The feature is Miss Lulu Davenport, but only the highest paid circus rider in the world but also the only woman who has successfully performed the double somersault on the broad round haunch of a galloping horse. Single forward and backward somersaults are her specialty and she does these first to limber up. This principal rider with Hagenbeck-Wallace comes to Wilmington tomorrow at 2 and 8 PM and the parade is at 10 AM."

The article then continued with an interesting and fictitious account as far as family history was concerned. Evidently it was felt that such an unlikely adventure story involving Lulu would attract even many more patrons to the show than the simple truth. Perhaps it was thought that the public could better relate to such an unlikely and interesting young lady as was pictured, even if the account was one of pure imagination. At any rate the article continued: "When the show is over, Lulu emerges from her private dressing tent and one would pick her out for a debutante or society girl. She is slim and just past her 20th year and unmarried.

"Her brother, Art Davenport, travels with the show and is on the executive staff. She is a graduate of Bryn Mawr. In school she was remarkably fond of athletics. One summer her father, a banker at Fall River, Massachusetts, spent a week with Hagenbeck-Wallace along with Lulu. She always yearned for a life under the canvas and her father believed a week of roughing it would remove all trace for her desire to follow the circus. The week with the show actually saw the little college girl blossom into a full fledged circus rider. Under the guidance of Dad Dockrill, the famous circus equestrian director,



The Orrin Davenport troupe on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1926. Left to right Orrin, Jr., Victoria Davenport, Bessie Castello, Lulu and Orrin Davenport. Pfening Archives.

she developed into a remarkable rider. She has duplicated every feat performed by a male rider and has left her sister riders far in the background."

In 1916 Reno McCree dropped dead at-Dayton, Ohio as he stepped from the center ring of Ringling Bros. Circus. Pluckily, Louise continued in 1917 as the sole owner and manager of the McCree Davenport troupe and also presented the "Silas and Sally Green" rube act that in 1918 became a bigger scream than ever. In that year she rode also with Edyth and Bessie Cas-

tello as the Riding Estrellas and with the Ed Waltons and Stella Wirth as the Riding Estrellas-Waltons.

In 1922 on Hagenbeck-Wallace, magnetic personality as an equestrienne put the act over with a bang and made her the individual hit of the show. As a bareback rider she demonstrated her all round cleverness as an artist. Three years later and still on Hagenbeck-Wallace she was riding with Orrin and Victoria Davenport, Bessie Castello and Mickey McDonald. Continuing on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1927 she rode with the Orrin troupe that then included Orrin Dorothy Davenport, Orrin, Jr., Ella

Linton, Mickey McDonald and Laurence Swalley.

She returned in 1929 as a principal rider to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey after a seven year absence from that show. She was also in Orrin's act that then included, among others, Dorothy Davenport and Ella Linton. She continued with the Riding Davenports through 1935 as well as with her principal act. In 1930 she went to Europe with her husband, Frank Cook, on a talent search for Ringling-Barnum.

Her last season was on Cole Bros. Circus in 1936 after which she retired in Chicago in order to take care of her ill sister May. In 1942 she married James F. O'Shea, a railroader.

Through the years, the circus careers of the five offspring of John and Ella Davenport mingled in the cooperative effort of hard work and development that brought success to all of them and stardom to more than one. A careful examination of the following tables will indicate that as the various members of the family began their professionals as circus riders, either the father or an older brother or sister was always there to help them get started and to polish their presentations. These tables furnish a chronology of the Davenport family careers for more than 100 years on American circuses.

The Riding Davenports on Ringling-Barnum in 1934. Ella Linton, Dorothy Emerson and Lulu Davenport on horse. Standing are Dorothy Davenport and Orrin Davenport. Pfening Archives.



Table I John L. Davenport, Sr. March 22, 1836 February 3, 1916 Ella Hollis Davenport 1854-July 25, 1934

1850 Robinson & Eldred

1852 to 1857 Spalding & Rogers\*

1858 Built ring barn in Newport, Ken-

1859 Antonio & Wilder \*\*

1860 Great U. S. Circus (Howes & Cushing, later Howes) (England)

1863-64 Robinson & Howes Champion

Circus

1865 Great Union Combination (John & Alex Robinson); F. J. Howes Champion Circus; New American Theater (Philadelphia)

1866 F. J. Howes Great Consolidated Circus (including J. L. Davenport's Great English Circus)

1867 Yankee Robinson 1868 Blight & Mundy

1869 Levi J. North (married Ella Hollis)

1871 James Robinson; Lake's Circus

1872 Kleckner & Conklin (O'Brien)

1873 Sells Bros. (Built ring barn in Toledo, Ohio.)

1874 Sells Bros.

1875 F. Dunham's show

1877-79 Sells Bros.

1880 Cooper, Jackson & Co.

1881 Beckett's Great Exposition

1884-87 Burr Robbins

1889 Ringling Bros.

1893 Criterion Theater (Chicago) (last appearance as a clown)

1895 Built ring barn in Chicago, Illinois

1906 Watler J. McDonald

1901 Walter J. McDonald; Sells & Gray \*1856 Mrs. John Davenport is also list-

ed. (not Ella)

\*\*Mrs. Davenport, elastic rider, is also listed. (not Ella)

> Table II John Davenport, Jr. December 24, 1869-April 6, 1947

1878 Sells Bros.

1881 Beckett's Great Exposition

1884-86 Burr Robbins

1889 Ringling Bros.

1891 Adam Forepaugh

1892 John S. McMahon

1893 John Robinson; Sanger & Lent

1894 F. J. Taylor Circus

1895 Walter L. Main; Sig Sautelle

1897 Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. 1900-1901 Walter J. McDonald; Sells &

Grav

1902 Sun Bros.

1908 Yankee Robinson

1911 Robinson Famous

1918 Ringling Bros.

1920 Hagenbeck-Wallace

1921 John Robinson

1922 Gollmar Bros.

1923 John Robinson



Orrin Davenport in 1938. Pfening Archives.

1928 Gentry Bros.

1929 Gentry Bros.; Cole Bros.

1947 Died at home of sister Louise in Chicago

Albert "Stick" Davenport December 2, 1871-September 10, 1932

1879 Burr Robbins

1881 Beckett's Great Exposition

1884-86 Burr Robbins

1889 Ringling Bros.

1891 F. J. Taylor

1893 John Robinson

1894 Walter L. Main

1896-99 Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros.

1900 Sells & Grav

1901 Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros.; Puerto Rico and West Indies

1902 Ringling Bros.

1904 Walter L. Main

1906-07 Cole Bros.; Campbell Bros.

1908 John Robinson

1909 Rice Bros.; Norris & Rowe; Mackey's European

1910 Campbell Bros.; Norris & Rowe

1911 Robinson's Famous

1913 Yankee Robinson

1914 Hagenbeck-Wallace

1915 Yankee Robinson

1916 Coop & Lent

1917 Coop & Lent; Marsh-Davenport

1918 Coop & Lent

1919 Santos & Artigas; Circo Rojo

(Cuba)

1920 Santos & Artigas; Campbell, Bailey & Hutchison

1921-22 Campbell, Bailey & Hutchison

1923 World Bros.

1924-25 Robbins Bros.

1926 Robbins Bros.; Al G. Barnes; Forepaugh-Lind (Chicago)

1927 Al G. Barnes 1928 Al G. Barnes (divorced Isabel Cummings) 1929-30 Al G. Barnes

> Table III May Davenport (Mrs. Bernie Mowatt) August 8, 1880-June 5, 1939)

1897-99 Adam Forepaugh & Sells

1900 Walter J. McDonald 1901 Walter L. Main; Puerto Rico

1902-05 Ringling Bros. 1906 Ringling Bros.

1907 Adam Forepaugh & Sells

Bros. 1908-13 Barnum & Bailey

1914 Hagenbeck-Wallace; Barnum & Bailey

1915-18 Barnum & Bailey 1919-21 Ringling-Barnum

Table IV Orrin Davenport April 17, 1885-December 17, 1962

1900 Walter J. McDonald

1901 Sells & Grav

1902-3 Sells & Downs

1904-05 Ringling Bros.

1905 Barnum & Bailey 1907 Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros.

1908 Barnum & Bailey 1909 Ringling Bros.; Married Victoria

Bedini

1910-11 Barnum & Bailey\*

1912 Barnun & Bailey; Rhoda Royal\*

1913-14 Barnum & Bailey\*

1915 Barnum & Bailey; N. Y. Hippodrome\*

1916 Barnum Bailey\*

1917 Barnum & Bailey; Santos & Ar-

1918 Barnum & Bailey\*

1919 Ringling-Barnum\*

1921 Ringling-Barnum; Pubill Moslem Shrine\*; (divorced Victoria) Pubillones;

1922 Hagenbeck-Wallace\*\*; Pubillones

1923 Hagenbeck-Wallace\*\*

1924 Hagenbeck-Wallace\*\*; Shrine\*\*' N. Y. Hippodrome winter circus

1926 Sells-Floto; Hagenbeck-Wallace\*\* 1927 Hagenbeck-Wallace; Shrine; London Hippodrome (Memphis); Bradna Shrine dates; (married Dorothy

1928 Hagenbeck-Wallace; Shrine dates 1929-30 Ringling-Barnum; Shrine dates

1931 Ringling-Barnum; Shrine dates; Great European Olympic; University of Wisconsin Eastern States Circus

1932 Ringling-Barnum; Shrine dates; Fred Bradna Circus (NYC)

1933 Ringling-Barnum; Shrine dates

1934 Ringling-Barnum; Shrine Stinson Indoor Circus

1935 Shrine dates

1936 Shrine dates (producer)

1937 Hagenbeck-Wallace

1948 Married former circus rider Dor-

othy Emerson on January 7.

\*Victoria Bedini appeared on all of these dates with her husband Orrin Davenport. Prior to her marriage she rode with the Bedini act on Barnum & Bailey in 1903 and on Ringling Bros. from 1904 to 1906. The Bedini troupe, which presented a marvelous jockey act, included Victoria, her father Victor and sister Flora as riders and her mother Adele as ring mistress. There was also the dog "Euro" that joined with the riders in the famous simultaneous jump-up. In addition, the Bendini sisters presented a clever dual bareback riding act and in 1904 Victoria did a Cossack riding act.

\*\* From 1922 through 1926, Victoria continued to appear in the Davenport act on these shows with her former husband, Orrin. She had married clown Joe Coyle on November 3, 1923. At the end of 1926 she and her husband left Hagenbeck-Wallace. They were on Sparks Circus in 1927 where she appeared with the Bendini riding act which included her brother-in-law and sister, Walter and Flora Guice and also Babe Feaster. In 1929 she rode with the Joe Hodgini troupe on Rob-

bins Bros.

Louise (Lulu) Davenport, August 19, 1887-? (Mrs. Reno McCree; Mrs. Frank Cook;

Mrs. James F. O'Shea) 1901 Walter L. Main

1903 Sells & Grav

1904-05 Ringling Bros. 1906 Carl Hagenbeck (3-27 to 4-7); Ringling Bros.

1907 Carl Hagenbeck-Great Wallace 1908 Carl Hagenbeck-Great Wallace, Moslem Shrine

1909-10 Ringling Bros. 1911 Hagenbeck-Wallace

1912 Talbot's Hippodrome (St. Louis);

Hagenbeck-Wallace

1913 Hagenbeck-Wallace

1914-17 Kingling Bros.

1918 Ringling Bros.; Santos & Artigas (Havana)

1919 Ringling-Barnum; Santos & Artigas

1920 Santos & Artigas

1922-25 Hagenbeck-Wallace

1926 Sells-Floto; Hagenbeck-Wallace

1927 Hagenbeck-Wallace; Bradna Shrine dates; Lulu Shrine; London Hippodrome (Memphis)

1928 Hagenbeck-Wallace; Kosair Shrine

1929 Ringling-Barrum

1930 Ringling-Barnum; Bob Morton Shrine (Lancaster, Pa.)

1931 University of Wisconsin Eastern States Circus

1932-34 Ringling-Barnum

1935 Detroit, Canton and Omaha Shrine dates

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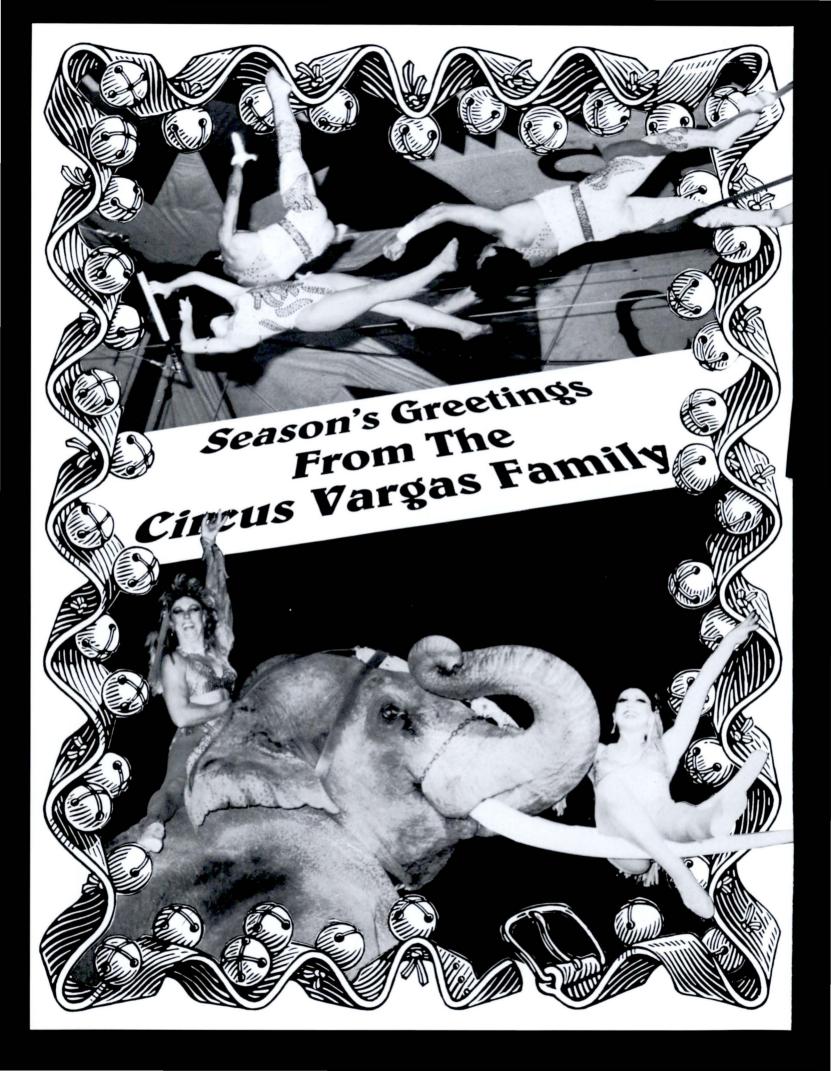


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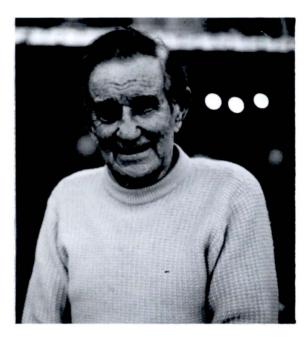
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# "THE LORD OF THE RING" BIDS FAREWELL

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

ollowing 11,697 performances before an estimated 100 million people, Gunther Gebel-Williams presented his tigers, liberty horses and elephants for the last time in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on November 18, 1990.

The farewell performance was an emotional experience that concluded a two day celebration climaxing his twenty years as the featured attraction of the Greatest Show on Earth. No other performer in circus history has been featured on a single show for as many seasons.

Over fifty CHS members came from across the country to see the finale performance. Most of them sat in a special section opposite ring one.

Following the on November 17 night show, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Producer Kenneth Feld hosted a reception honoring Gebel-Williams. Sawdust luminaries from around the world were in attendance. Be-

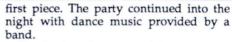
sides Ringling executives and their families, and red unit personnel, those on hand for the event included such notables as John Pugh, coowner of Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus; Trolle Rhodin, Ringling European talent co-ordinator; Jeanette Williams and her daughter Caroline; Andres Atayde, owner of Mexico's largest circus; Enis Togni, Italian circus impresario; Ian Garden of Canada's Garden Bros. Circus; Greg Circus Parkinson, World Museum director; Chappie Fox, retired Circus World

Museum director and Ringling executive; authors John Culhane and Ernest Albrecht; David Larible, gold clown winner at Monte Carlo and 1991 red unit feature; Roby Gasser, Swiss seal trainer, and Charlie Smith, retired Ringling-Barnum train master.

As soon as the audience cleared the arena tables and chairs were set for an elegant buffet in the center ring at the Pittsburgh Civic Arena. Following the buffet Gebel-Williams was called to the center ring where Feld presented him with a "Gunther Farewell" tee shirt. Each of those in attendance was later given one as a remembrance of the occasion.

Feld toasted his star, after which the two cut an enormous "Farewell Gunther" cake, with the animal trainer having the

Gebel-Williams presenting his liberty horses during the night show on November 17. All photos by Fred Pfening.



The final performance of the season on November 18 was scheduled to start at 5:30 pm. At 5:15 ringmaster Eric M. Gillett called Gunther, wife Sigrid, son Mark and daughter Tina to the center ring. In a short ceremony Gebel-Williams was presented a plaque from the Circus Fans Association of America by Dale Riker. The president of the Pittsburgh Civic Arena gave the trainer a framed stylized drawing of himself. Feld then presented him with a sterling silver sculpture designed by Tiffany.

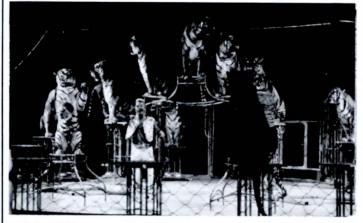
The last performance began on time at 5:30. Each time Gebel-Williams appeared he met thunderous applause. The liberty act came first, then he was back with sixteen tigers. As he left the cage for the last time after the act he was embraced by his son Mark and they walked to the back door with their arms around each other. After the elephant number, his last appearence in the business, he received a standing ovation. For what was surely the only time in his life Gebel-Williams stopped at the back door and took a final bow.

At the conclusion of the performance Eric Gillett explained to the audience that this was the final performance of the season and then called Gebel-Williams back to the center ring and emotionally introduced for the last time "The Lord of the Ring, Gunther Gebel-Williams" who returned to the ring and expressed his appreciation to circus owner Feld and all of those he had worked with over the years. He then presented his boots to his son Mark. Daughter Tina joined them and Tina's son stepped forward with a box of

Kleenex. It was an emotional moment. Gillett then invited the entire red unit personnel into the arena and introduced the management. Amid lots of hugging the circus band played the traditional Old Auld Syne.

The weekend of celebrating Gebel-William's retirement was complete. The show packed up quickly to make room for Fleetwood Mac, appearing the next night. By early the next morning the train was moving home to Florida.



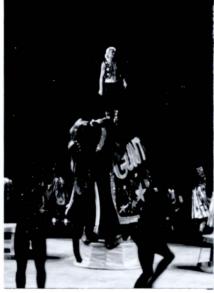




Gebel-Williams working his tigers for the final time.

Gebel-Williams cutting his retirement party cake with Kenneth Feld at left.





The Lord of the Ring and his elephants appear for the last time.

Kenneth Feld presenting the silver sculputure.



#### Wishing Pou

### Happy Holidays and a Safe Season

Gunther and Sigrid Gebel Mark Gebel Tina and Edward Del Moral





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he high grass states of Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma spawned a number of small and medium size truck circuses in the 1930s and 40s.

One of these organized in 1945 was owned by Tom Ewalt of Geneva, Nebraska. Ewalt had a background in tented rep shows playing Nebraska and Kansas.

In 1944 Ewalt joined with Vernon Pratt, a Hugo, Oklahoma banker and grocer, to operate a small truck circus called Hugo Bros. A month or so after the Hugo show opened Ewalt and Pratt parted company with Ewalt taking his six horse liberty act, four pony drill and the elephant Ena that he had purchased from Hamid-Morton in the spring of 1944. Ewalt advertised his horse, pony and elephant acts being available for bookings in November of 1944.

With his animals and animal trucks as a basis he began planning a circus for the 1945 season. He owned a farm with heated buildings in Geneva and the show was framed there.

Ewalt selected Bell Bros. as the title for the new show. The Bell title had been used on a small truck circus from 1940 to 1942 owned by Sam Dock, an old time performer who had started in show business on French & Company in 1883.

News of the circus did not reach the *Billboard* until the January 20, 1945 issue. A Bell ad appeared in this issue wanting useful people in all departments, family acts, concert people, concessions, mechanic, cook and grooms.

The first full news of the show, also in that issue, read: "Bell show will hit road on 12 trucks.

"Geneva, Nebraska, January 13.—Bell Bros. Clrcus, under management of Tom Ewalt, of this city, will move on 12 trucks;

Bell Bros. Circus canvas truck in Broken Bow, Nebraska in 1945. Art Stensvad photo.

#### SHORT SKETCHES OF FORMER SHOWS



big top will be a 70 with three 30s, and side show, a 50 with two 30s. Neal Tucker is assistant manager; Shorty Gilson, in charge or canvas, and Camel Dutch, the elephants.

"Cage wagons, canvas loader and light plant, semi, are under construction. Other equipment is ready for paint shop. Twelve head or ring stock are in quarters at the farm, where a stable and ring barn were built last fall."

The next mention of the Bell Bros. came in an ad in the March 31 *Billboard*. The show wanted one or two acts doing two or more turns or a family. The show offered a seventy foot top with three middles for sale.

On April 8 Ewalt wrote to Virg Campbell in Fairbury, Nebraska as follows: "Yes, what you read in the *Billboard* is true, Bell Bros. Circus is going out of Geneva, Nebraska.

"Our big top is an eighty with two 40s. Have a nice fifty by thirty-eight side show. Both tops are practically new. We have twelve head of ring horses and a nice twenty foot animal cage wagon. I

will have twelve trucks back and two ahead. It is pretty difficult to open at the present time as it is hard to buy animals. Have a very good advance, and have four with the bill car. Will throw a large amount of paper.

"As to our opening date, it will be April 30. Agent leaves this week and will probably open somewhere in the south. At the present writing I can not say definitely what town it will be.

"Will more than likely set the show up here at the fairgrounds the week of the twenty-second, to get everything adjusted and line up."

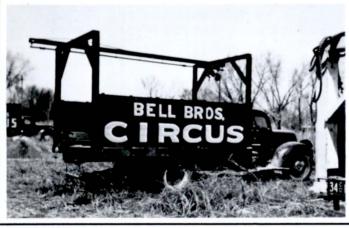
Another ad appeared in the April 7 *Billboard*. This one advised all people engaged for the

season to report for an opening on April 28. The show wanted two billposters.

Bell Bros Circus opened on April 30 in Geneva. Art Stensvad visited the show shortly after it opened and took an inventory. The big top was an 80 with one 40. The side show was a 50 with two 25 foot middles. The show carried one elephant, one donkey, eight horses, four ponies and a cage of monkeys. The rolling stock was:

- 1. Semi-trailer, bull truck.
- 2. Semi-trailer, power plant and side show.
  - 3. Semi-trailer, horses.
  - 4. Semi-trailer, cookhouse.
  - 5. Semi-trailer, seat jacks and poles.
  - Semi-trailer, office tickets.
  - 7. Straight bed, props.
  - 8. Straight bed, air calliope.
  - 9. Straight bed, canvas.
  - 10. Straight bed, canvas and seats.
  - 11. Straight bed, concessions.
  - 12. Trailer monkey cage.
  - 13. Trailer, stake driver.

The Bell Bros. air calliope pick up truck on May 3, 1945. Art Stensvad photo.







The Bell Bros. Circus elephant semi in Broken Bow, Nebraska. Art Stensvad photo.

The show moved west quickly and by June 4 was in Chinook, Montana. It remained in that state until the 13th when it entered North Dakota at Watford City.

The first full report on Bell Bros. appeared in the June 9 *Billboard*. It read: "Bell Bros. touring Montana to OK biz.

"Lewiston, Montana., June 2. Bell Bros.

Bell Bros. Circus newspaper advertisement used in Linton, North Dakota in 1945. Pfening Archives.

Clrcus, which opened at Geneva, Nebraska, May 30, has moved Into Montana and has been playing to good business despite some bad weather.

"Staff includes Tom Ewalt, owner-manager; Mrs. Ewalt, treasurer; John D. Pose, advance; Louis Ingleheim, brigade agent; Mrs. Inglehelm, heralds; Bill Jokes and James Terry, billposters; James Con-

nors, equestrian director; Paul Elubbard, announcer; Bob and Katherlne Ewalt, tickets; Neal H.. Tucker, front door, assisted by Glen Grady; inside tickets, Inez Sweet and James Connors, transportation; George Sweet, electrician; Glen Grady and Henry Hamilton, canvas; John Lynn and Blackie Woods, seats; Ernie Magness ring stock; Swan Loghry, elephants; Campbell Dutch, cookhouse; Guy Blackburn, commissary; Mary Bymun and Isabel Hill, candy stands; Frank Bymun and Mack McKay, Cecil Albee, Prank Evans, George Toel and Lucky McGlook, butchers.

"Big show program includes Capt. Tom Ewalt, elephant and liberty horses; Robert Ewalt, ponies, dogs and monks; Katherine Ewalt, prima donna, rings and ladder; Inez, Nelda and Frank Sweet, iron jaw and traps; the Eddys, rolling globe and wire; Connors Troupe, electric rollo; Lateena Coriell, web and ring; Everett Coriell, head jumps and head slide; Robert Ewalt and James Connors menage; High-stilt Eddie and Jack Armstrong, clowns, assisted by Edna and Maxlno Dorey and John, Shorty and Theodosia Beli.

"Side show Line-up: Paul Hubbard, manager: Betty Hubbard, magic; Juanita, illusion; Viola Grady, escape; Gypsy Cory, palmist; Guy Blackburn, Hawaiian.

"Recent visitors were Jack Plummer, band leader; Norman Anderson, of the Bud E. Anderson Clrcus and Irving Romig of the Romig Rooney troupe, both in the army, John Lane, former trouper, and P. M. Silloway, CFA of Lewiston."

The June 30 Billboard carried this report in the dressing room gossip: 'This one is still running in the black, three shows being necessary at Pekin, Wyoming, recently.

"The boss was seen looking at the old Whitmore and Bond Bros.

equipment on Highway No. 6 near Plentywood, Montana, and he said: 'There is a man's life ambition gone, a decaying monument.'

"Katherine Ewalt is working her aerial ring act. The old maid's frolic, web and ladders, features Maxine Dorle, Nola Grady, Tiny and Betty Sweet, Emma Magness and Lateena. The rainy day wardrobe has been put away, and the number makes a real flash.

"Orchids to Blackie Woods and crew for effective handling of the big top and inside; to Jimmie Conners, equestrian director, for a snappy program; to Mrs. Frankie Woods for her hot meals and her mothering the working staff.

"Note to Mrs. Laure Anderson, of Arthur Bros.: We have a softball team and challenge yours.

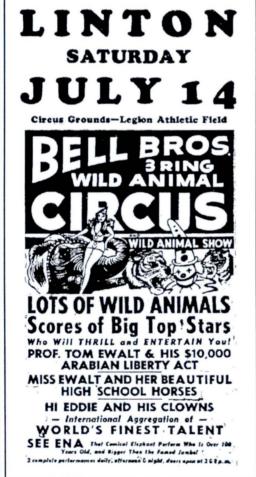
"Scammony to clown alley for not keeping up to date and wearing white; to Gypsy Cory for losing his head."

The July 7 Billboard carried a Bell Bros. want ad which read: "On account of enlarging show want family acts and calliope player. Will buy elephants, camels and other hay eating animals. Will buy an 80 with three 30s and a good used marquee." Three stands were listed in South Dakota.

The August 4 Billboard carried this report in the dressing room gossip: "Two big weeks in North and South Dakota and good biz has everyone smiling. Manager Tom Ewalt has a new dog act in each ring, presented by Katherlne and Nola, that is being well received. The Conner Duo and High-stilt Eddie have left for the fairs, being replaced by three members of the Free family and George Churchill brothers, clowns, Betty Sweet is going strong with her trap number and Delda Sweet, in an acrobatic number assisted by Everett Corlell, continues to draw the applause. Paul Hubbard's side show is packing them in. Paul is happy these days because his daughter, Irene, is visiting. The McKay-Bymum stands are doing a big

"Mr. and Mrs. Blackie Woods received news their son is on the high seas. Their

Bell Bros. Circus concession truck in Broken Bow, Nebraska. Art Stensvad photo.





daughter, Frankie Lou Woods of the Riding Duttons, was a welcome visitor. Neal Tucker is the busiest man on the lot. Connie Grady is forever asking about mail. Note to John Foss: Would like to see you before the first snowfall. John Lynn, manager of the whale show, with Jack McCleary lecturing is doing well. Bill Ehr is the new legal adjuster. Gypsy Cory met a few boys from the Million Dollar Band of World War I."

A July 14 *Billboard* Bell ad wanted a calliope player, family acts and an equestrian director, dog act, elephants, camels and other hay eating animals.

A dressing room gossip piece in the same issue on Bell Bros. read: North and South Dakota gave the show big receipts the last two months, and Nebraska spots are doing okay. The first stop in Nebraska



Ena the elephant and her semi-trailer on the Bell Bros. Broken Bow lot in 1945. Art Stensvad photo.

was O'Neil and it gave two packed houses

'Tom Ewalt is getting everything repainted for the trek South. Blackie Woods does a good job of getting the show up and down on time.

"The most popular place on the lot is the cookhouse with Mrs. Woods in charge. The Dean Family has joined along with Chief and Princess White Eagle, who are working the concert. John Lynn has the whale and deep sea show and novelties."

The September 15 Billboard carried an article dated September 8 headed:

"All's well with Bell; or let the truth prevail

"Conflicting accounts from Kansas indicate that Bell Bros. Circus, a new show this season, may be moving in all directions.

"Or it may be folded, if a telegram reaching *The Billboard* from Phil Leon otherwise unidentified is to be believed, Leon wired from Omaha as follows: 'Bell Bros.' Clrcus was forced to close last Sunday at Hoxle, Kansas. A new show this season sad mistake. Tried to show every



Sunday. Everybody got tired and quit. Show was booked until September 27. Other dates to follow.'

"Meanwhile, at Hoxle, Kansas, John D. Foss, the general agent, was being toasted

for the route he had given the show this season. He was presented a traveling bag in token of appreciation, according to a letter written on a Bell Bros. letterhead by Bill Golden.

"The route thru September 19 was given in the letter written by Golden. It schedules Ulysses, 9; Syracuse, 10; Johnson, 11; Elkhart, 12; Hugo-

ton, 13 and Liberal, 14, all Kansas spots, with Laverne, 15; Arnett, 16; and Vici, 17 following in Oklahoma.

"Bill Ehr, legal adjustor, visited with friends at Hays, Kansas. John Lynn, who now has the sweets, was reported doing a

"Two strong houses welcomed Bell Bros. at Newton, Kansas, August 31. At Oxford, Nebraska, the day previous, the show played to a full house at night. There was no matinee."

The show was in Johnson, Kansas on September 11. The last route available

This large Bell Bros. bill stand was posted for the McCook, Nebraska stand of May 18, 1946. Joe Fleming photo.

An aerial view of Bell Bros. Circus in Great Bend, Kansas, May 4, 1946. Pfening Archives.

had Bell in Vici, Kansas on September 17. The closing date is not known.

Tom Ewalt had made it through his first full season as a circus owner.

#### 1946

Bell Bros. Circus placed an ad in the January 5, *Billboard* with its needs for the 1946 season. Family acts, concert and side show people were wanted as was a boss canvasman, billposters and a lithographer. The show again wanted to buy camels, llamas and hay eating animals.

The first news of the Bell show in the new year appeared in the February 2 *Bill-board:* "Bell Bros. adds animals, trucks and new canvas.

"Expansion of Bell Bros. Circus in winter quarters at Geneva, Nebraska, includes addition of two llamas and a camel from the John D. Wixom wild animal farm.

'Three additional trucks have been purchased. Neal Tucker is building a new cage wagon. Big top will be an 80 with two 30s and a 20. Kid show will be a 50 with two 30s.

"A new pony drill and dog act are in training. The show will carry twenty-three head of horses and ponies."

The March 30 *Billboard* published a Bell Bros. ad wanting a side show manager and side show people. On April 6 the show advertised for a bandleader and musicians.







The Bell Bros. pole and seat jack semitrailer in 1946. Joe Fleming photo.

The show opened the 1946 season in Geneva on April 28 and the route again moved rapidly west. Wheatland, Wyoming was played on June 1.

On May 18 the show advertised for circus people in all departments, seatmen, riggers, canvasmen, acts for side show and musicians. A week later another ad appeared with the same needs plus advance people.

This report of the Bell opening appeared in the June 1 *Billboard:* "Program, staff for Bell Bros.

"Geneva, Nebraska, May 25.—Bell Bros. Circus got away to a good start here April 28. Big top is a 50 with two 30's and a 40. Side Show is a 50 with two 30's.

"A new addition is a cookhouse, mounted on a semi-trailer, carrying a kitchen at front end and counter and stools along sides. Cookhouse can seat twenty-eight. Mrs. Frankie Woods, who has two helpers, is in charge.

"Show is owned by Mr. and Mrs Tom Ewalt. Staff personnel also includes: Joe B. Webb, announcer and equestrian director; George Hanlon, legal adjuster; Harry Ballard, front door, with Mrs. Ballard on reserved seat tickets and Mrs. Jack Harrison on back reserves; Tom Arton, brigade, with Jehu, Bill Brown and P. Dryson, billers; Bill Ehrs, advance agent; Joe Walters, boss props, with five assistants; Pete Hanagan, who has four assistants, in charge of ring stock; Camel Dutch Dubel in charge of menagerie and elephant; Shorty Lynn,

The Bell Bros. ticket and office semi-trailer in 1946. Joe Fleming photo.

general superintendent, and Lavern Stoley, electrician.

"I. B. Duncan heads six-piece band, which consists of Frank Duncan, calliope; Fred Franklin, drummer; Russell Harrison, clarinet; Ernest Thompson, trombone and Vern Duble, cornet; besides the leader.

"Side Show personnel includes Joe Webb in charge of the cages containing lions, monkeys, and two honey bears; Janie Waguyer, sword box; Chief White Eagle and Company, whips; Larry King, magic; Velma Harrison and Bob Ewalt, tickets; Willie Rawls, talker, and Lawrence Helser, who has four assistants, has grease stands and concessions. Program follows:

No. 1-Columbiana spec, with entire personnel.

No. 2-Dogs and ponies worked by Bob Ewalt and Peggy Harrison.

No. 3-Mrs. Pete Woods, tight wire.

No. 4-Jack Harrlson, Billy Thompson and Q. Woods, clowns.

No. 5-Mack and Jack Miller, comedy acrobats.

No. 6-Virginia Lind, hand balancing. No. 7-Chief White Eagle, roping.

No. 8-Liberty horses presented by Bob Ewalt, assisted by Billy Thompson.

No. 9-Miller's and Woods dog acts.

No. 10-Peggy Jean Harrison, Spanish

No. 11-Bill Miller, barrel kicking.

No. 12-Military ponies presented by Bob Ewalt.

No. 13-Clowns.

No. 14-De Cole Trlo. juggling.

No. 15-Pete Woods, with clowns, table rock.

No. 16-Miller Troupe, tumbling.

The thirty foot horse semi-trailer on the Bell show in 1946. Joe Fleming photo..

No. 17-Elephant presented by Tom Ewalt.

No. 18-Miss Ewalt and Peggy Jean Harrison ladders.

No. 19-Chief White Eagle and Company, whips.

No. 20-Billy Thompson and Lilly Mae, baby gag.

No. 21-Katherine Ewalt, rolling globe.

No. 22-Clowns.

No. 23-Liberty act worked by Tom Ewalt.

By July 18 the show was in International Falls, Minnesota and was again advertising for concession men for the side show and musicians, mechanics and canvasmen.

On August 3 the show again advertised for a boss canvasman and musicians.

The following week an extensive article appeared in the *Billboard* reading: "Bell Bros. gets some good biz on Minnesota tour.

"Milaca, Minnesota, August 3-Tom Ewalt, owner-manager of Bell Bros.' Circus, is finding his Minnesota tour pleasant and profitable. Tho this is new territory for the show, it has met enthusiastic crowds at nearly all stands. Milaca had a capacity matinee and turnaway at night July 15. A line half a block long and three or four deep was still clamoring for tickets at the white wagon when the window was closed at spec time.

"Show's physical appearance seems to

Bell Bros. semi-trailer no. 11 contained the light plant and side show equipment in 1946. Joe Fleming photo.





go a long way in selling it. The 15 straight and semi-trucks are all beautifully painted and lettered. The new all-white big top is an 80 with three 40's. Kid show has a new white top, 40 by 80, with a 120-foot banner line.

"At Newell, South Dakota, show experienced a blowdown. Big top damage was confined to a one-foot tear, thanks to Shorty Lynn, boss canvasman. However, an end piece of the kid show

top was ripped to shreds, and a cage wagon was overturned. In the turmoil, door separating the compartments of the cage came loose and the bears in one side made a meal of four monkeys in the cage...

"Recently joining were Doc and Borghild Ford, Lewis and Claudia Ford, Barney and Jimmy Arnesen, Jack and Peggy Jean Harrison, the Four Millers, and Harry and Mrs. Ballard.

"Doc Ford, as equestrian director, makes the performance unroll with zip and dash reminiscent of the old Al G. Barnes show. The program (in August) was:

No. 1-Grand Entry.

No. 2-Loop, Borghild Ford.

No. 3-Bob Ewalt working pony and riding monk.

No. 4-Miller's comedy acrobatics. No. 5-Prince Chico, wonder horse.

No. 6-Arnesen Bros., clown number.

No. 7-Swinging perches over rings 1 and 3, Lewis Ford and Borghild Albertlna; web over ring 2, Peggy Jean Harrlson.

No. 8-Tom Ewalt with Ena, a bang-up elephant act.

No. 9-Dogs in rings 1 and 3.

No. 10-Clowns: Barney and Jimmy in William Tell gag.

No. 11-Barrel Kicking, William Miller.

No. 12-Military ponies, Bob Ewalt.

No. 13-Cloud swings, Mrs. Ford and Lew Ford.

No. 14-Clown levitation.

No. 15-Ewalt's hlgh-school horses.

No. 16-The Four Millers, acrobats.

No. 17-Clown water gag.

No. 18-Swinging ladders.

No. 19-Rolling globe, Katherine Sue Ewalt.

No. 20-Barney's chair balance.

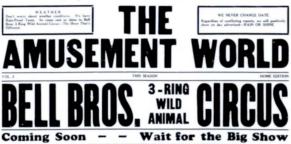
No. 21-Clown walk, Jack Harrlson.

No. 22-Liberty horses, Tom Ewalt.

"Staff: Tom Ewalt, owner-manager; Mrs. Helen Ewalt, secretary-treasurer; Doc Ford, equestrian director and side show superintendent; George Hanlon, legal adjuster; Mr. and Mrs. Harry Ballard, front door; Shorty Lynn, boss canvasman; Lee Crawford, prop boss; I. B. Duncan, bandmaster; Mike Kibba, chief electrician;

John Foster, boss mechanic, and Camel Dutch, menagerie superintendent. Duncan's band has eight pieces, playing swell circus music. Cooper's cookhouse satisfies 85 people three times a day.

The August 10 Billboard carried the following in the dressing room gossip column: "This show has been hitting the money spots so consistently in Minnesota



MAMMOTH MENAGERIE AND MUSEUM, CONGRESS OF STRANGE PEOPLE FROM ALL PARTS OF THE OLD AND NEW WORLD.

BIGGER, GRANDER, GREATER THAN EVER. EVERYTHING NEW BUT THE NAME. IN THIS YEAR'S WONDER CIRCUS.



Startling New Acts. Royal Roman Hippodrome. The Highest Class Circus in all the Universe. The real source of all the Best Circus Ideas and Features.

Originality predominates in every Act and Feature, present a mighty multitude of brand new International wonders and features—Hundreds of enticements for young and old.

#### MAMMOTH WORLD of WONDERS

The Greatest Riding Event of the Century. Peerless Beauties and Male Stars



The front page of the four page newspaper courier used by Bell Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.

and the Dakotas that when we do have one that's not a turn-a-way we wonder what is wrong. At Warroad, Minnesota the show played a matinee only, and after a swell chicken dinner in the cookhouse, Mr. and Mrs. Ewalt chartered a boat and took the entire personnel on a cruise on beautiful Lake of the Woods.

"This show should have the title 'The most beautiful show in America,' as it is the cleanest and makes the best appearance of any this writer has seen in many years. We had visitors from the C. R. Montgomery show."

However the business situation on the show was not as bright as stated by Ford. The country was suffering from the spread of polio which was affecting business of many outdoor operas. The Patterson and Bernard shows closed and Mills Bros. went to the barn early in the late summer of 1946.

The bomb dropped with an ad appearing in the August 24 *Billboard* reading: "For sale Bell Bros. Circus.

"Complete motorized circus, 12 trucks; new 70 foot big top with 3 middles; marquee; side show top, elephant, liberty horses; pony drill; menage horses; llamas; lions; monkeys; 3 light plants; cook house on semi; office wagon; band bus; calliope;

> stake driver, canvas loader. Lock, stock or barrel, or piecemeal. Thomas Ewalt, Geneva, Nebraska."

The news of the Bell closing appeared in the September 7 *Billboard* with this article: "Sale of Bell Bros. off

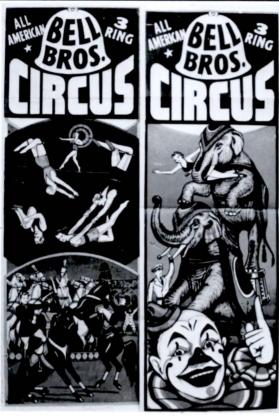
"The grapevine circulated a report this week that John Loy, of Henderson, North Carolina, had bought Bell Bros. Circus from Tom Ewalt and was reorganizing it at Fremont, Nebraska. Inquiry by the Billboard brought a statement from Ewalt, however, that the deal failed to materialize and he had taken the show home to Geneva, Nebraska. Ewalt also told the Billboard from Geneva that other parties were negotiating to buy the show, but up until Friday (30) no transaction had been made. He cited his wife's health as his main reason for selling, altho he intimated he wanted more time to devote to his theater in Geneva.

"The Bell show played a lot of Minnesota and is known to have suffered some adverse business from the polio scare there and in adjacent territory. The outfit won widespread praise for its clean, attractive appearance and pleasing performance."

The September 14 Billboard told more about Bell closing in this report: "Doc

Ford writes of Bell closing.

"September, 7. L. B. (Doc) Ford, who was with Bell Bros. Circus the last part of its season, has nothing but the highest praise for both the show and its owner, Tom Ewalt, in explaining the circumstances connected with its closing. He writes: 'A beautiful show that will leave pleasant memories for the writer for many years to come has folded and wended its way to the barn at Geneva, Nebraska. Business for the past four weeks had been so bad due to polio that Ewalt had to dig into the old sock at every stand to take care of expenses. Show played Fremont, Nebraska August 19 to a mere handful of people, and next morning Ewalt announced the show was sold, that the new owner would arrive Saturday to take over and he wanted all people with the show to remain. Ewalt also announced the show would lay off one week in Fremont and then resume its route, that all people remaining would be



The title treatment on these Bell Bros. posters is unusual. Pfening Archives.

paid one-half a week salary for the lay-off week.

"But the new owner did not arrive Saturday or Sunday, at noon Monday (26) Ewalt received a wire which he showed the writer, stating the new owner could not complete the deal. So Ewalt announced personally would pay off everyone as agreed, and this he did-all salaries and the half-week guaranteed. This was a very fine gesture on the part of Ewalt. The writer can only say farewell, good luck to a wonderful family and thanks for a pleasant season."

Ewalt prepared this complete inventory of his show for prospective buyers:

- "1 White big top, new, 70 with two 30 and a forty.
- 1 White side show top, fifty with two 30s.
- 1 White marquee, new, 20 by 30.
- 1 1941 Chevrolet tractor and 30 foot semi for horses.
- 1 1941 Chevrolet tractor and 28 foot semi for elephant.
- 1 1938 Chevrolet tractor and office semi.
  - 1 1939 Ford tractor and pole semi.
- 1 1942 Ford tractor and 30 foot semi for light plant.
- 1 1938 Ford tractor and cookhouse
  - 1 1942 Ford bus for band.

- 1 1941 Chevrolet straight truck, side show.
- 1 1941 Chevrolet straight truck, canvas.
- 1 1942 Chevrolet straight truck, props and seats.
- 1 1938 Chevrolet advance truck.
- 1 GMC pick up with calliope.
  - Two wheel stake driver.
  - Two wheel water wagon.
  - 1 Four wheel cage wagon.
  - 1 Mechanical canvas loader.
  - 2 Public address systems.
  - 1 Female elephant, Ena.
  - 1 Six horse liberty act.
  - Pony drill.
  - 2 Lions, male and female.
  - 2 Bears, male and female.
  - 1 Male rhesus monkey.
  - 1 Female rheses monkey.
  - 1 Black spider monkey.

3 Light plants, banners, poles, ticket boxes, maskings, curtains, blues and reserve seats, cables, cookhouse equipment, saddles, bridles, trappings. Many other items to complete show."

Apparently Ewalt had few takers from his ad to sell the show. He advertised again in the October 19 Billboard: "For sale. Six horse liberty act; new seventy foot top, white, with two thirties and a forty; one fifty foot white top with two thirties; one khaki eighty foot top with one forty middle; new white marquee, 20 by 30; mechanical stake driver; calliope; light plants and plant semi."

Much of the equipment was sold. By the first of the year he still had part of the show for sale.

On January 16, 1947 Ewalt wrote to Charlie Campbell as follows: "Yours of

The Bell Bros. Circus marquee and four pole big top in 1946. Bette Leonard photo. January 13 at hand, and will say that Mr. Loy of Hendersonville, doesn't have any of our show property. He dealt for the circus complete but was unable to complete the deal. So after closing the season, I piecemealed the circus, and it has gone here, there, and every where. We have left the seventy foot white top, new, with two thirties and a forty, trimmed with red and blue, with all stakes and poles and rigging. Top was new last spring and used only a few weeks. A beautiful top and in A-1 condition, \$3,000.00.

The marquee is white, matches the top. has proscenium, all poles and stakes, also A-1, \$300.00.

"One used khaki top with one forty middle, in good condition. Needs just a little repair around one bale ring, all roped with manilla rope. This is an eighty foot top, \$500.00.

"Have a twenty foot pole semi fitted to carry poles for the above white top, has a fifth wheel, four new wheels and four new tires. Fine piece of equipment. Also have a light plant semi."

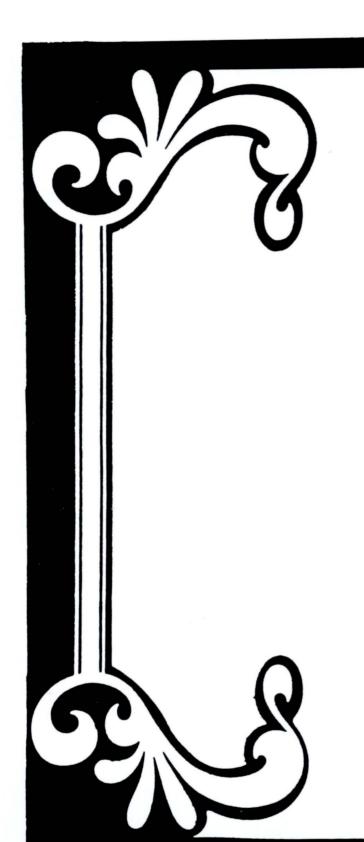
An April, 1947 Billboard reported that Charlie Campbell, Ernie White and John Loy had joined to operate King & Franklin Circus. It is not known if any Bell equipment was purchased for this show. King & Franklin was open for a few months that year.

In November 1946 Ewalt sold his six horse liberty horse act, a llama, the horse semi-trailer and a stake driver to James M. Cole. The elephant Ena was sold to Dale Madden and was on the Madden-Stillman Circus in 1947. It is not known if the remaining Bell equipment was sold. Ewalt still had the pony drill as late as June of 1947.

Tom Ewalt did not return to the circus business after his two year fling as a show

Joseph Fleming was helpful in preparing this article.







## Holiday

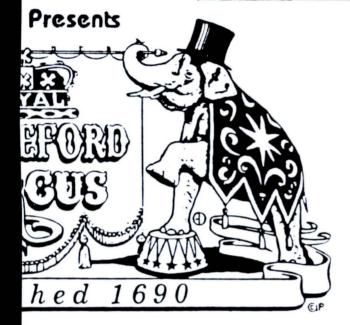
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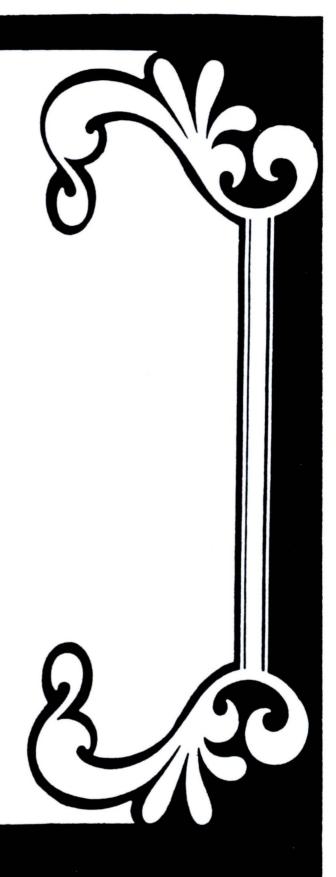
## Greetings

ends Everywhere

nd Nellie Hanneford

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he only thing sacred around The Greatest Show on Earth these days is the herd of elephants. Everything else is subject to change or extinction.

In addition to having to deal with an increasingly sophisticated-if not downright jadedaudience, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, who for most of its glorious career has not had any serious artistic competition, suddenly finds itself being challenged by the likes of such one ring upstarts as the Big Apple Circus, Cirque du Soleil and the Moscow Circus.

All three of these circuses have learned to make a virtue of being smaller. Ringling, on the other hand, despite such persuasive evidence to the contrary, continues to believe that bigger is better, and in its resolute refusal to renounce what had once been America's unofficial slogan, it still puts three rings on the floor (although they are seldom simultaneously filled) and sees itself not only as America's best, but the Greatest Show on Earth. Ironically the Ringling show is one of the few exportable commodities that is just as big a hit in Japan as it is in the U.S. At least in its debut season, it was. Subsequent shows have instigated lawsuits by their Japanese promoters, charging inferior quality.

But in the domestic market, Ringling, in the person of its producer Kenneth Feld, is rethinking its approach to design and marketing in much that same way that

America's auto makers are having to do. The problem, however, is hardly a new one to the people who have succeeded in keeping the Greatest Show on Earth on the road, for the past fifty years or so. John Ringling North, the man in charge back in 1940, was promoting his version of the show as "Redesigned for a Modern Age." He was battling Hollywood and television. Today, Kenneth Feld has an even

more formidable array of entertainment choices with which to do battle. In addition to films and TV he's got to compete with rock music in all its various forms and shopping malls for the attention of over stimulated audiences.

Fifty years ago John Ringling North's solution was to quadruple the spectacle. He annually sent out a show featuring four huge production numbers teeming with costumes and glamor.

Guy Laliberte's answer for today, is to create a show that has as much

# Ernest Albrecht



Flavio Togni, the feature of the Ringling-Barnum 1990 blue unit. Ringling-Barnum photo.

to do with dance, theater and music, as it does with the circus. His Cirque du Soleil is a highly imaginative and unified display that showcases each of its acts and somehow manages to tie them all together into a satisfying whole.



Paul Binder's Big Apple Circus books a number of "guest artists" whose specialties are related to an overall theme.

The latest box office power, the Moscow Circus, simply tries to overwhelm one with the exotic skills of its individual performers who are seen one at a time.

Kenneth Feld has tried to do all these things and more. In four of the past five season he has come up with a new curiosity that he has promoted with all the hoopla and hokum of a P. T. Barnum.

Perhaps it is in the very nature of the circus to look backwards and forwards at the same time, for even as he reached back into the most traditional methods of promoting the Greatest Show on Earth, Feld has presented such attractions as the Living Unicorn, King Tusk, Tahar and now Flavio Togni in a manner and style that is decidedly contemporary might, in fact, rival a rock concert.

Each of these attractions has been showcased in a lengthy spectacle that includes the show's entire cast of clowns and showgirls, its animals and tons of paraphernalia. Larry Billman who has been staging the show for the past four years has taken to showcasing several acts within the framework of the spec. From the relatively static pageants which featured first the unicorn and then the elephant King Tusk, he has moved to an extended display featuring several of the show's more outstanding acts all of which tend to support, either by

virtue of who they are or what they do, the overall theme.

But it isn't just the scenario of the spec that has changed in recent years. So have the technical aspects which provide the theatricality. This year the Big Show features a new computerized lighting system that has been adapted from rock shows which play similarly sized spaces. The rock industry, Ringling's associate pro-

ducer Tim Holst says, has not only raised the sophistication level of the audience and therefore its expectations, it has also provided the advanced technology which has made touring such equipment feasible for the circus.

For years the Ringling show has been at the mercy of the technical facilities, or lack thereof, found in the buildings the show normally plays

Tahar, the feature of the 118th Ringling-Barnum edition. Ringling-Barnum photo.

during its national tour. This new system should, Holst says, work in them all and "make it possible for us to give the same show everywhere."

Now at last the Big Show can enhance its various displays by the kind of atmospheric lighting that has long been a staple of the theater.

Ringling designers and dreamers have also been experimenting with numerous other special effects like fog, pyrotechnics and lasers. Each of these has been used in the show in the past two years, and more should be expected.

The show is just as progressive in its music department. "Old time circus music is gone," Holst observes. "Advances in the electronic production of music are phenomenal." Not only has the music that accompanies the acts changed, the bandmaster now helps reinforce each display, like the clowns' production numbers, for instance, with a variety of sound effects. The bandmaster can now provide all sorts of comic and dramatic sound effects that once could hope for nothing more than the drummer's rim shots.

Overall the constant thrust has been toward speed. What the performance seems moving toward ultimately is a duplication of the speed and excitement created in one of its sixty second television commercials. The show moves from act to act in a series of quick cuts that can leave one breathless.

For those acts not presented within the fame work of the spec, entrances are all but a thing of the past. Practically every act, particularly those that require some time getting into, begin with the performers already in place. The flyers are in the air, the animals on their stools, and the hand balancing acts are in the ring ready to begin the minute the ringmaster blows his whistle and the lights come on. Speed, movement, and color are the three watchwords.

The Ringling show has been steadily moving toward this kind of presentation ever since the Felds bought the show in 1967. The first staging change they made in the circus was its opening pageant, although there was nothing particularly novel in this. The idea has been common in many other forms of theater where it is simply known as the opening number.

The Ringling people have been experimenting with giving the opening various kinds of themes, without notable success. Billman's Gypsy caravan a few seasons ago was merely choaotic and last year's salute to Hollywood bordered on the silly, reminiscent more of the ice show than the circus, in its pointless display of costumes and props. But even if the bang tends tends to fizzle, it does get the show started.

Where this segment of the show will go



The finale of the Gunther Gebel-Williams elephant number in the 1989 Ringling-Barnum red unit. Fred Pfening photo.

in the future is not yet for publication. Neither is Billman's replacement. After four years of staging the production Billman is now out of the picture. All questions concerning matters artistic are being fielded by Holst himself.

One thing is for sure. There are no rules. "Each new show can be whatever it wants to be," says Holst. If that sounds like a paraphrase of the Cirque du Soleil slogan "We reinvent the circuses" it is because all circuses have in recent times shown what amounts to a prodigious propensity to wax philosophical. They've all been just as busy redefining who and what they are, and what they been scouting new wonders from the four corners of the earth.

While its competition has tended toward the consciously arty, the people on the Ringling show have opted for what they call the earthy. Translated that means animals: in addition to lots of elephants of all sizes it means alligators, lions, tigers, rhinos, panthers, and unicorns surrounded by Zulus, gauchos, break dancers and dazzling production.

"We are trying to keep up with changes taste," reports Holst whose tour of China, Mongolia and Russia gives credence to his vow that "in order to do that we've got to go places we've never been before." is, of course, speaking artistically well as geographically.

And if all the various circuses succeed in what they've set out to do, "That's great. A good circus

is a good circus no matter who does it and when the public is satisfied with one circus its good for all circuses." You see what I mean about being philosophical?

But the Big Show is not about to stop at merely searching out new acts. It has also had a hand in creating and developing a few. The most recent example of this is the living statue act that was one of the highlights of the Roman orgy Ringling produced last year as a farewell salute to animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Willaims.

Previously the brain trust came up with an act that was meant to be something of a production number all by itself. It combined trampolines, tumbling, and clowns in a number that was typically lacking in focus

The techniques used in these acts have probably been inspired by The Flying Cranes, the flying act on the Moscow Circus which has single handedly revolutionized the manner in which traditional circus arts are being presented.

With so much creative energy around the world being devoted to changing the look of the circus, is it any wonder that Ringling has taken to reinventing itself?

Los Gauchos Latinos in the 120th edition of Ringling-Barnum. Ringling-Barnum photo.



## Happy Holidays





If you would like one of our 1991 Circus Calendars, send \$1.00 to cover postage to: GRAPHICS 2000, 2475 CHANDLER, SUITE 6, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89120

two-car circus owned by Elmer Jones, king of the two-car shows, was enroute from Warren, Ohio, to Detroit, Michigan, on October 8, 1913. Detroit, of course, wasn't a play date for it was much too big for the outfit. On board were Gilbert Wilson and his wife, Lillian (nee Wilson). He had a casting act and was the show's horse trainer. She was an aerialist doing both double and single trapeze. There, on the moving train, their only child, a son they named Gilbert Ernest Wilson, was born. Thus began the lifelong circus career of Dime Wil-

# Dime Wilson Over Seven Decades A Gircus Showman

By Tony Conway

The Wilsons stayed with this show, by whatever title, through the season of 1919. Dime has said that for his money it was the greatest show on earth. The consist was one baggage car and one combination coach and baggage car. Both were 80 foot cars. The four knock-down wagons stowed in possum bellies beneath the cars and there were four draft horses

and all of this kept switching back and forth from the cars to the lot. In addition, there were high school horses and six or eight ponies.

The show had two elephants, two camels, six or so small cages, and a calliope. A pit show was on the midway. The show was lighted by carbon gas and apparently later switched to electric. The big top was an 80 with three 30s while the sideshow and menagerie was a 50 with two 20s. Starbacks were used. Crosseyed Charlie was in charge of loading and unloading. Young Gilbert really began performing around the age of four or five years.

The season of 1920 found the Wilsons on the John Francis United Shows, a railroad carnival. Wally York and Gilbert Wilson were partners in one or more acts. It can be surmised that "Lil" continued with her trap turns. Gilbert, Jr., began as a clown wearing whiteface, probably in a one-piece costume. Like most kids, he was given a nickel here and a penny there by show folk who took a liking to him. And no matter what coin he was given, he'd take it to the office wagon and exchange it for a tencent piece, a dime. Soon, Mrs. Francis, who ran the office, began exclaiming: "Here comes Dime again," whenever the youngster showed up. Gradually, one person

and then another picked this up and soon everyone knew who was meant if you spoke of "Dime." "My real name," Dime once told the author, "is Gilbert but I went to court and had Dime made my legal middle name. Ask anyone on a show I'm with for Gilbert Wilson and they won't know any such person; but mention Dime and it's a different story."

Bime Wilson Base A

The John Francis carnival moved on twenty-five cars, had its own baggage stock, and carried three elephants. It had wagon fronts for its shows. Bands of ten or twelve musicians were used for bally and a unafon provided a bally encore. Downtown ballys were given only in the evenings. The outfit had twelve rides, eight or ten shows, and the usual kinds of concessions.

Several years later the Wilsons were on the Campbell-Lucky Bill Circus, a wagon show owned by Lucky Bill Newton out of Quinimo, Kansas. The canvas wagons and

equipment wagons were like boxes on wheels. The troupers lived in rebuilt delivery wagons, such as some readers may recall as bread and milk wagons travelling local streets across the U.S. not that long ago. Four or six mules pulled each wagon on the show. Most overland shows were true "mud shows." Paved roads didn't exist outside cities, not even

into nearby towns. So it was swirls of dust in dry weather and rutted muddy tracks in wet weather. The usual haul was eight, or ten, or twelve miles. If the show had to make twenty miles, it was an off day with no performances. A string of extra mules was carried and the wagon teams were changed every hour or two.

By the age of six or seven, Dime was driving a team of mules. There were never enough drivers and he'd learned to drive naturally so he had to help out. Roads, he stated, were dirt then, little more than wagon tracks worn in the wild grass that flanked the right of way. More than once the drivers were given instructions that when they reached a stream at a certain point they were to turn into it and drive right down the stream bed until they located a specific boulder or other noticeable landmark at which point they were to return to land again. It wasn't unusual for wagons and teams to become mired in quicksand and the show people would have to struggle to get everything out again. Sometimes, a wagon had to be left behind and at least once in Dime's experience they had to shoot the mules so as to cut short their losing battle with the

A studio photo of Dime Wilson taken in the 1940s. Pfening Archives.

sucking mud. Gil Wilson was the show's equestrian director and stock man. There were four or five families of performers and three or four clowns.

Back then, the show provided coffee for the workingmen doing teardown. The cookhouse man would make a regular wood campfire and then suspend a big three-gallon coffee pot across it from two Y-shaped rods or from an arm coming out from a tripod. One such night, young Dime was running around the lot like kids do, not paying any mind to what he was doing, or where he was going. Strange, but no one saw him or stopped him. Dime bumped into the coffee pot. It tipped on him in such a way that he got most of it on one leg. The burn needed a doctor, but did no lasting harm.

The Campbell-Lucky Bill elephants--Jap, Tex, and Diamond-were all considered to be outlaws. Then, as now, all elephants were called "bulls" regardless of sex. The show also had horses, ponies, zebras, and both bactrian and dromedary camels. Often, as a matter of fact, there were twenty camels at one time. All of these hooved animals are called "lead stock" in the circus and on this show they were herded across country from one date to another. First would come a feed wagon with an open box of grain on its open tailboard. Then would follow the animals herded by the show's cowboys who kept them more or less under control. Next came a second feed wagon which, when there was one, also led the show's buffalo.

Dime told the author he had his own miniature circus around this time. He used to lay it out, put it up, and do just about everything the workingmen were doing with the real show. It never missed a date, he added. And he actually put it up in all kinds of weather. The tents were made from the show's cloth banners, which "banner men" tacked high on building walls in downtown areas, from which the remaining color and starch had been washed out. Dime's animals and people were celluloid and cast-iron figures given him as gifts or which he bought in five-and-tens along the route. He made the wagons himself from cigarbox wood. Later on, when shows added trucks, Dime added trucks to his show. Back in the 1950s, Dime still had it packed away somewhere but he was concerned, just a bit, that it was probably with trunks that had been parked somewhere along an earlier route.

A few years later, the first trucks arrived on traveling circuses. Dime recalled Velie trucks delivered to the Honest Bill show at Ada, Oklahoma, where the show was wintering on the fairgrounds. The manufacturer sent along an instructor to



Lucky Bill Newton standing by his ticket wagon in 1921. Pfening Archives

teach the show's men how to drive. Since the show was building its own bodies, all they had was boxes to sit on while driving. Dime watched and learned from observing. He asked to try driving and the instructor was more than a bit doubtful. Dime insisted he'd learned from watching the others and the instructor finally gave him a try. "There I was," Dime said "all of

Campbell Bros. & Lucky Bill poster used in 1923. Circus World Museum collecton.



them." Later, the show also used Samsons and Reo Speedwagons.

"Of course," Dime explained, "the bosses tried to squeeze as much equipment as they could on every truck. Their thinking was good; they figured they could cut down on the number of pieces of rolling stock. But they soon learned that they'd overdone it and had to cut down the loads and return to some wagons." Those early trucks weren't tractor-trailer combinations, but straight-body trucks, and were all chain-drive models. So it wasn't too surprising that the new motive power did little or nothing to speed up moving operations.

Asked how and when he met his future wife, Connie, Dime explained. "I met Connie on Seal Bros. She was Connie Doile, niece of Bud Anderson, the show's owner. She was working swinging ladders and elephants. Later she added webs, trapeze, and rings. Her part of the family weren't in the business; so she was supposed to stay away from the show folk. It happened like most romances, I guess. There we were within sight of each other day in and day out. First, we got to chatting; later, I took her to a movie; then there was a bite to eat after the show. Anyhow, within a year we had it bad and everything was set. We were married quietly and without fan fare between seasons at her home in Kansas City." That was on New Year's Eve, 1937; Dime and Connie celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in December 1989.

The following season found the Wilsons on Zeiger United Shows appearing with the free circus the carnival featured. Connie did magic, palms, and birds. Gil had dogs and ponies. And Dime worked the front, did clowning, and "worked monkeys from Norris," including rhesus, spiders, and baboons. "We were with it for two and a half years," Dime said. "Actually, it was given on a stage at the back end of the midway, the very last thing each night. We were what they called the blow off. It was the thought of staying for us, for our show, that kept the public visiting the various shows, going on the different rides, and buying things like hot dogs and lemonade." He thought they had Mabel Stark's cats, Robinson's elephants, and the Four Jacks and a Queen (Schellers) trampoline routine. The Wilsons did OK.

Back in the mid-1950s Dime told me: "The kids were born all over the place. Penny arrived in Kansas City. So, too, did Trudy. Joanne put in her appearance at St. Helena, Oregon, while we were with Arthur Bros. Circus, then a truck show. But, frankly, I almost didn't care at the time. Now, it seems funny. We'd gotten a stake driver from Uncle Bud's outfit. I was working it. Well, we placed this one stake

and started driving it and the daggone thing hit a hornet's nest. Boy, was I ever bitten. I lit out and headed for our trailer. Connie was expectant but there was time to spare. She took one look at me and decided we should get me treated at the hospital. So we headed off. We got to the hospital, the nurse took one look at me and then at Connie. I got pushed into a chair and Connie disappeared upstairs. Two hours later a nurse bounced happily in saying, 'Guess what! You're the father of a baby girl weighing seven pounds and so many ounces.' I looked her right in the face and told her: 'That's just jolly.' Well, I'm not sure I give a good darn. All I want is to get treated. I've been bitten.' Along comes, a doctor. He takes a look at me, counts the bites and finds there's 27 of them. And all he gives me is something to drink, maybe it was whiskey, I don't know. It tasted like some kind of alcohol. Well, I went back to the show, but my face was so swollen that I couldn't work for days.

"But, to get back to the kids—Linda was born in Kansas City, Donna arrived in Richmond, Virginia, and little Dime put in his appearance at Waco, Texas. Funny thing, (back there in the 1950s) Donna acts like a Southern belle on occasion and sometimes you'd swear Little Dime was a real westerner. Oh, Connie rejoined the show with Little Dime when he was only five days old, and that was a good air flight distance from Galveston to Waco."

Often in talking with Dime, the two of us would find we were just jumping around from one thing to another, a recollection of this and then a story from some other time and some other show. What follows are a few of these "stories."

"On Hamid-Morton," at some point in the 1950s, Dime recalled, "it was customary for the band to lead the grand entry followed by the various performers, animals, and so on. The elephants always brought up the rear. Well, we were up in Canada and the show started and away we went. I was helping out by playing the drum with Joe Basile's band. There was a loose board and the elephants panicked when they stepped on it and it didn't hold. Everyone, and I mean everyone-band, performers, and all-went over the wall into the audience. With the bass drum on, I just couldn't make it. So only Al Vidbel, our elephant superintendent, and myself were in the arena. What could I do? I just stood there and beat on the drum while Al quieted his huge charges."

"I was a boyhood friend and companion of Harry James, the trumpeter and big band leader, in the days when



Charlie Drydan and Dime Wilson on Bud Anderson in 1940. Pfening Archives.

his father, Everett James, had the big show band on Christy Bros. In fact, weboth played in the sideshow band. I played bass drum and Harry played snare drum."

"When Banks Wilkison and I put out Wilson Bros. Circus it was under a fairly small big top, just a 70 with three 30s. To

Connie and Dime Wilson in the 1940s. Pfening Archives.



tell the truth, we never made our nut and only lasted about five weeks. Rain didn't help us either."

"Now and again, people get talking about ghosts and visions and the like, Dime began. "I always tell them I just don't believe in such stuff. But then I think back on what happened out there at the Bud E. Anderson winter quarters. There were a number of buildings on the place, including a big one where we had all the elephants, cage animals, and the like including the show's monkeys and some monkeys I owned. Another large building right across the way was for the horses and there was a cookhouse built into one side of it so we could feed everybody on the place. The trucks were lined up behind this barn.

"Every night before going to bed I'd go out and feed my monkeys. Besides, I had a mother monk and her baby and I was feeding her extra, a mixture of eggs and milk, so she'd nourish the baby proper. My cages were all box type and they sat on a long board table. Well, I took care of the batch of them and was up on the table feeding the mother. To make it easier, I'd wrapped the chain from her collar around my wrist. That's when it happened.

The elephants began swaying from side to side, the cage animals began to stalk excitedly from one side of the cage to the other, the monkeys began to bounce about. Then the elephants began trumpeting, the animals growling, the monkeys chattering. All the time, I didn't think anything of it and went on feeding my mother monk. And there were two handlers in there in there sitting around a big pot-bellied stove.

"From out of nowhere came this, I guess you'd call it blast or gust of wind. It turned over the stove, sent the pipe sections flying and threw the two men to the floor. And just as quick it came at me. It was like an icicle, a cold hand brushing across my face. Yep, I went too, with the mother monk still tied to me by that chain, clutching her babe to her.

"Sitting up, I looked about me. The two men were sitting there, too. Nobody said anything. Then they stood up and, without uttering a word, began replacing the stove, fixing the pipe in place, tidying up in general. I wondered if I'd imagined the whole thing but decided not to say a thing. So I got to work righting my table, putting back the monkey cages, going about my work as if nothing had happened. Even when I'd finished, no one said anything. So I just said 'Good night, fellas,' and headed for my bed.

"But as I came out the door, there was Tighe McKeown, in charge of the horses, standing over by the horse

building. 'Hey, Dime,' he called, so I went on over. 'What in hell happened over in that animal building?,' he asked as I came up. 'Nothing, Tighe, nothing at all,' was my reply. 'Nothing!, Nuts!,' he rejoined, 'Whatever it was came through here, too. Get more excited horses in that building than I've ever seen before. Broke at least half the halters in their frenzy. Whole bunch of them milling about down at the back end of the building. Nothing, huh?'

"I muttered something or the other and went on in to bed. Next morning, I woke up late and the talk already had started. The two guys in the animal building had told just about everybody their version and Tighe had had his innings, too. Well, even when they started asking me questions, I wasn't too sure I ought to talk. Oh I finally did, of course. And all the stories fitted together just like the pieces of a puzzle.

"Hah!" That's when Bud E. came swaggering out like a big cock-sure Texan and asked in a booming voice just what it was all about. So we all pitched in and told him our stories once again. 'Huh,' he snorted, 'Gusts of wind, ghosts, nuts! There's no such thing. Let's go take a good look around.'

"Course, he didn't find anything. But that didn't satisfy him. He sent for a veterinarian and had him go over every horse, elephant, monkey, and all the rest. 'Not a thing wrong with a one of those animals,' the Doc announced when he was done. 'There all as sound as can be, Just one of those supernatural things, that's all. They happen all the time. Nope, you don't need me here.'

"Like I said, I don't believe in ghosts and the like. But sometimes people don't understand when you tell them what you know you've experienced. I just don't talk about it very much."

Another incident came to mind: "Out in Colorado," Dime recalled, "I was driving one of Uncle Bud's elephant vans down a large mountain. Connie was beside me and we had the baby (Penny) with us. The transmission suddenly went out completely. We had both mechanical and electrical brakes, I put them on and held tight. The grade was so steep and the load was so heavy that within a very short distance we'd burned out the mechanical brakes. men, in about another mile, we burned out the battery from the electrical brakes and there we were with nothing in the world to hold us back. In no time flat, we gave up looking at the speedometer; it was simply too daggone high and would only have added to our worries. Down, on down we rushed. Luckily, all the show trucks had pulled off at the lot ahead of



The famous Dime Wilson table rock in the 1940s. Pfening Archives.

us, So we went tearing right on by, clear through the town before the outfit slowed itself and came to a halt. Uncle Bud had been following us and pulled up alongside us. 'Hey,' he calls over, 'Don't you know you passed the lot about three miles back?' I was so daggone mad I told him he could take the darn thing 'cause we weren't going to touch it and I told him just what had happened. Just then, the bull man who'd been riding in the back stepped out. 'Hey, Dime,' says he,

Dime Wilson on Bailey Bros. Circus in 1944. Pfening Archives.



'Weren't you going just a bit fast there?' That did it! We turned, Connie, the baby, and me, and walked to the lot."

"Lots of funny things happen to you," Dime recalled. "But I guess the funniest probably was one of the earliest. Back on the Honest Bill show we often set up on fairgrounds. You know, the kind with the high board fence that was white washed. Well. this one time we decided to make a night move using kerosene lanterns. In those days, the big top itself was lit by gasoline lanterns. Anyhow, we started tearing down right after the show. Pretty soon the plank wagon was loaded and off it went. I had the pole wagon and it was always about the last thing off. So some two hours later I got underway. Got outside the fence and there was this guy with the plank wagon. 'Hey, Dime,' he calls out, 'how the heck do you get out of this town? When I started out they told me to stay on this here road. That's just what I've done and I just can't seem to get away from this

fence.' Yep, that's right. He'd driven around and around that fairgrounds for a full two hours."

"You know the shows are always losing stuff or having it stolen," Dime said. "Well, over on Big Bob Stevens' Bailey Bros. show a guy stole the canvas wagon and it was missing for three days. We looked high and low for it, Had the state police out and everything else. Then one morning a farmer went out to the lower portion of his barn and saw a truck lettered Bailey Bros. Circus. He simply hadn't had any reason to go out there for a couple of days. So he called the state police and they notified us and we went and picked up our rig.

"Now, this one wasn't so funny," he continued. "We were with Downie Bros. down in Florida. The water truck was loaded for the trip to the next town and went off. Cookhouse moved at night so we'd arrive at the lot and everything would be all set up. Well, that was the last we saw of that truck. I'm pretty good at picking up every stray item, even stakes, and I had my eyes open, as usual. Well, we drove along near this canal and I thought I saw one of our blue seat planks floating on the water. It being there didn't make much sense, so I used it to poke around in the water. So I hit something solid and kinda big. Well, we checked and there was the whole water truck, driver and all. He must have fallen asleep and failed to take a turn in the road and let the truck slip into the canal.

"On shows like Sells-Floto, you get so you expect almost anything," Dime noted. "Elephants do panic and cat animals will

get out of their cages or get through the chutes. It happens enough that you don't give too much thought to it. Besides, you know the handlers will round them up and everything will be all right. So, this one day I was seated on my wardrobe truck in the dressing room kibitzing with Paul Jerome and Arthur Borella. After a bit, Paul points behind me and manages to blurt out 'Dime! Behind you!' But I didn't pay him any attention. We were always cutting up and I figured it for another gag. Just a few seconds later, Arthur points behind me. 'It's a lion,' he says. I still figured it for a joke and didn't bite. The next thing I knew, something rubbed gently against my arm, but I figured it was another of the guys helping with the gag. But I did turn. Right there was a big male lion. I froze. Everyone was frozen. The menagerie men located him and in notime at all he was captured and back in his cage. And not one person was hurt in any way the whole time he was out.

"Now, Sells-Floto was really big time when we were with it. It had grown to 40 cars and was presented in five rings. Zack Terrell, who later owned his own show, Cole Bros., was manager. Mabel Stark and Allan King had cage acts. Joe Metcalf was head elephant man. Johnnie Agee, equestrian director for Ringling before the combine with Barnum & Bailey, had his barrel-walking brewery horses. Flying acts were the Wards, the Clarkonians, and the Arbaughs. Fred Ledgett was equestrian director. And the Poodles Hanneford riding act was at its greatest height.

The incomparable Poodles was, well, incomparable. He was one of the show's biggest drawing cards, if not our very biggest, But one time Poodles took sick. Now, with a lot of acts that would have been the end of it; they just couldn't have gone on. But Otto Griebling, one of the top clowns of all time, I believe, was with Sells-Floto that year and he knew how to ride. Besides, then, he looked so much like Poodles that you couldn't tell the difference. Well, Otto went into the act and everything worked out just fine.

"Of course, after a bit, Poodles began getting better. He was well enough that he wanted to work, but not well enough to do the heavy part of the routine. So we had two Poodles for awhile. This went over swell with the audiences. Poodles and Otto would ride in together in an open car and the act would go on. Poodles did mostly clowning while Otto did the feature riding. After a bit, Poodles was fine again and Otto just dropped out. But, let me tell you, it was something to have two Poodles in one ring!"

With a complete change of direction, Dime told me: "It wasn't on one of the rail shows that I saw my first cage act. It was back there on the Honest Bill wagon show. Bill had bought animals, chutes, steel, cages, and all from the 101 Ranch Wild West Show.

"I think the most talented wild-animal trainer I ever knew was Frank Phillips when we were on Downie Bros. Circus. One of the lions was a handsome male called Leo--he became famous as Leo, the MGM lion. In fact, the movie company bought the lion and its cage truck and hired Frank to go around to all its theaters. They'd park the truck outside on



Gil and Lil Wilson, Dime's parents, on Hunt Bros. Circus in the late 1950s. Claire F. Conway photo.

the street and twice a day Frank and Leo would put on a wrestling show. It was the best wrestling lion exhibition I have ever seen. But that wasn't the sole reason for Frank's reputation He put together a mixed group including lion, lamb, and dog. Think he also once had an act with a goat, bear, and leopard; I know I saw such an act somewhere. Oh, on Downie there was an elephant they called Teddy. Well, 'Red' (don't remember any other handle) couldn't handle it, but Frank Phillips managed him quite well."

Over the years, Dime learned tumbling, leaps, trampoline, revolving tables, flying, and, a big feature of Dime's over many years, the table rock. Growing up on the same show at the same time were any number show folk whose names have become familiar to circus goers. On Floto, Dime mentioned, Bill Morris, Gracie

Hanneford, Kay (Clarke) Burslem, and Bobby Nelson, On Haag and later on Downie, Dime mentioned Teresa, Conchita, and Lola Morales and others of their family.

In 1939 the Billboard ran a poll as to who were the tops in each of a number of circus-act categories. The votes were tallied and the results appeared in the December 30, 1939 issue. There were two clown categories, carnival and circus. Since Dime was then with Zeiger United

Shows, he belonged in that grouping. A white-face Dime won his category with 13,992 votes, and Emmett Kelly topped the circus category with 9,503 votes, Others whom Dime recalled receiving votes were Shorty Flemm, Felix Adler, Otto Griebling, Percy Smith, and Milt Taylor. Not only did Dime head the clown groupings but he came in eighth among all categories.

On another occasion Dime recalled, "Now, you talk about blow downs, we were in one back when Honest Bill had his Orange Bros show. It was an Oklahoma tornado." The author never learned the details. "We had a hurricane hit us back in 1926 when we were with the old Downie Bros, show at Key West, Florida," Dime noted, "and the Clyde Beatty show lost three big tops in one season due to storms." But he never filled in the details. "Remember Hurricane Hazel back in 1954," Dime queried. "We were on a fair date at Mineola, Long Island, New York,

when it hit."

"Fires," Dime questioned. "Sure, they happen and they can be bad But they're seldom anything like that one too-well covered Ringling big top fire. Once, Downie Bros. had a fire which cost the show its marquee, its menagerie top, one round of the big top and half of one of the middles. And trucks often burn on the road. I remember one time when the Beatty pole wagon burned between towns. The driver got out of it alright; he probably stood around watching the thing burn to a crisp. It was weeks before the show got new poles."

"We came off the Hamid-Morton 1946 fall route, six weeks including Philadelphia and Baltimore, and found ourselves in Sarasota, Florida, once more, Dime began. "Here, I ran into Ralph Clawson who was then helping to get the James E. Edgar version of Sparks Circus

ready for the rails.

"My gosh but I'm glad to see you he told me, you're just the man we need.' With that, he went on to tell me of all

their problems and what they were trying to do. Well, I hired on; I guess you'd say I was a carpenter. In the weeks that followed, we did the interiors of three former army hospital cars, turning them into two stateroom cars and a berth car. We also made the ring curbs and a lot of other props such as a rail show would need.

When we got everything finished, Jimmy Edgar tried to sign me on for the coming season. But I told him I wouldn't go because this was a rail show and I had grown used to my truck and trailer. That didn't stop Jimmy Edgar; he just said 'Alright, we'll put your truck and trailer on

one of the flats.'

"I thought he was nuts and told him as much. Giving me half a flat when he only had a 10-car show to begin with! He insisted he wasn't kidding. Look, I finally told him, I like you, I like your show, but I'm not going out on a rail show this season; maybe some other year. Thanks anyhow."

During one of our talks, Dime explained that he and Connie thought that rail shows weren't the best place to raise their youngsters. He seemed satisfied with the various shows he toured with and that he'd settled on what he felt was possible.

In 1964 we caught up with Dime and Connie when Hamid-Morton played a high school stadium in Alexandria, Virginia. Several seasons later we traveled to a small town in Pennsylvania (probably Oxford, once the winter quarters for Al Wheeler's shows) to catch Hoxie and visit with Dime and Connie. Often we'd stop off in Gibtown for a short visit while enroute to Sarasota.

The route of Dime and Connie was always interesting. In the last 20 years they were with the Hugo Zacchini Circus; Gil Gray, the Texas Shrine dates; Rudy Bros.; Bill Kay; Eddie Zacchini dates; and, most recently, Vidbel's Olde Tyme Circus with their long-time friends, Joyce and Al Vid-

My personal recollections of Dime include an excellent Jargo routine, the outstanding table rock that kept the audience in suspense as the arc kept increasing and the stack kept intact, and, in recent years, a well-done balloon-animal turn.

Dime's abilities were evident in the well-made truck body always painted a dark green that he built. I believe his folks had an identical unit when they were with Hunt in their later years. If it exists, that truck should be in a circus museum.

You always felt welcome, always felt comfortable, with Connie and Dime. On a show, they did what they were there to do, coming and going, and stopping for a brief moment before yet another appearance in the show. They were always waiting at the back door well before their cue. They were professionals and they inculcated this sense of professionalism in all their family.

Troupers such as Dime Wilson never "go away." You carry their image with you and you recall the sound of their voice and their little mannerisms. It's said that the "talking clown" disappeared



Dime and Connie Wilson on Hamid-Morton in 1964. Author's photo.

long, long ago. Not quite yet. On many shows, Dime was a talking clown. Listen to his raspy voice and you know he's had a verbal give and take with the ring master-announcer in many a center ring. Think about it, Dime's was the voice of a clown, a big-show announcer, a sideshow talker before the days of public address systems. It's part of a glorious past. Body mikes and improved sound systems don't make up for the talent and personality of a Dime Wilson. See you down the road,

Gilbert Ernest "Dime" Wilson died July 24, 1990.

#### Chronology of Wilson's career.

An Elmer Jones two-car circus (Cooper Bros. and various titles); 1913-1919

John Francis United Shows, a railroad carnival 1920

Lucky Bill wagon show; Lucky Bill Newton, owner 1921

Honest Bill wagon show; Honest Bill Newton owner 1921

Campbell Lucky Bill show 1922

Orange Bros.; Honest Bill Newton, owner 1923

Moon Bros., Honest Bill Newton, owner 1923

Gentry Bros.-James Paterson Combined; James Paterson, owner 1924

Cooper Bros. 3-car show; Elmer Jones, owner (Cooke, Cooper & Rice, Dan Rice, etc.) 1924

> Wilson & Briggs; "Dad" & Bert Briggs, owners 1924

Christy Bros. a rail show

M. L. Clark, 3-month winter route, Kansas & Oklahoma 1925-1926

Rose Killian, a 2-month spring route 1926

Andrew Downie's Downie Bros. Circus; trucks 1926 and

Sylvan-Drew Circus 1928 Sells-Floto Circus, 1929, 1930, half of 1931

Downie Bros. Circus; half of 1931, 1932, 1933

Lee Bros. Circus; truck show, G. W. Christy, owner; 1934

Barney Bros., Tom Atkinson, John Foss and Billy Dick owners, fall of 1934

Barney Bros. 1935

Seal Bros.; Bud E. Anderson, owner 1936 and 1937

Haag Bros. Circus; Harry & Roy Haag, owners 1937, 5 or 6 weeks

Wilson Bros. Banks Wilkison & Dime Wilson, owners 1937 (3 months)

Barney Bros. 1939, 3 to 4 weeks

Zeiger United Shows, railroad carnival 1938, 1939, & 6 weeks in 1940

Bud E. Anderson Circus; 1940, 1941 Macon Shrine show in off season

Wallace Bros., Ray Rogers, owner 1942 Pollack Bros. 6 months in fall of 1942, spring of 1943

Arthur Bros.; truck show, Martin Arthur, 1943

Sparks Carnival; Jesse Sparks, owner January to March 1944

Bailey Bros.; Bob Stevens 1944

Kemp Time, winter theater dates, 1944,

Clyde Beatty Circus; 1945

Sparks Circus; truck show, James E. Edgar, owner, 1946

Hamid-Morton 6-week fall route 1946

Sparks Circus (In winter quarters helping to build equipment) 1946-1947 winter

Hamid-Morton spring 1947 Pollack Eastern 1947 to 1950

Rogers Bros. Circus; Si Rubens, owner

Hamid-Morton 1952 through and including 1959

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#### The Artist:

Tracy Heaston has been involved with music and the circus since he was a small child. He played the calliope for the first time under Merle Evans at age 11 when the Ringling Brothers Circus came to Los Angeles in 1969. Tracy has a B.A. in percussion instruments. He has been featured in many parades, circuses, and fairs, on radio commercials, in two movies, and in many other promotions. He is noted for his feather touch on the calliope.

#### The Calliope:

Calliopies were originally steam pressured instruments in which each valve released steam to a different sounding pipe. Tracy's calliope was first purchased for a river boat, The Cotton Blossom, and has been rebuilt and put back into service operated now by a gas powered blower. Very few of these rare instruments are still in existance. They are used today only on special occasions and expositions.

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have known Jeanette Williams both personally and professionally for nearly 20 years. Together, we worked with both Ringling-Barnum circus units and Ringling's one-ring Monte Carlo circus which toured here and in Japan and Australia during the late 1970s.

Today, we're both "youthfully retired" from the sawdust trail, but the circus is never too far away from either's memory or heart. Since parting the circus ring, Jeanette's only blood descendant, daughter Caroline, is the sole

surviving standard bearer for the Williams family's circus logacy

liams family's circus legacy.

For Jeanette Williams, the road to circus fame dates back nearly two centuries. Descended from the renowned German circus family named Althoff, Jeanette is a first cousin to Franz Althoff, who today successfully operates the Circus Williams-Althoff in Germany.

At one time, there were six Althoff circuses operating simultaneously in Germany.

Circus buffs may remember a young, elegant Franz and his stately former wife, Evy, who were recruited by the late John Ringling North for the Greatest Show on Earth, appearing with Ringling-Barnum through the early 1970s. Back then, Franz, his father, Adolf, and later Evy, presented their horseback-riding tiger act, and in the 100th anniversary circus edition (Blue Unit), Franz also presented liberty horses alongside Jeanette.

According to Jeanette, it was her late Uncle Franz Althoff, Carola Althoff-Williams' brother, who taught Gunther Gebel-Williams how to train elephants. "Uncle Franz was widely-known for his elephant training skills. When my father was killed in 1951 after a Roman chariot riding accident while we were performing in England, my mother decided to close our circus, at least temporarily.

So, while the show was off the road, Gunther, who was 16 years old at the time, was sent to work with my uncle on his show. During this time, he was taught the basics of elephant training from one of Europe's best trainers."

Jeanette's own full-time circus career began in earnest when she was eighteen, fresh from boarding school and a German business school degree.

"My mother wanted my brother and me to ex-

# Equestrienne EANETE WILLIAMS Last of a Graus Pedigree

#### By Jerry Digney

perience other worlds besides the circus, so off we went. Although I spent summers touring with the show and learning the business, it wasn't until later that I got to travel full-time with the Circus Williams. My mother was never too enthusiastic about my decision to pursue the circus as a career. I guess she thought that it was too hard a life for a 'softie' like me."

But Jeanette prevailed, learning all she could about horse training from Gunther Gebel-Williams, who himself was taught most everything he knew about animal training from Jeanette's father, Harry.

It was during this time that the two young performers fell in love and got married. Looking back, Jeanette recognizes that the marriage was almost immediately doomed.

"I love Gunther like a brother. He was 'spiritually adopted' by my family and given the family name by my mother. But as a husband and wife, we weren't well-suited. I have great respect for him as a

Circus Williams on the lot in Berlin, Germany. Traveling on 180 European rail cars it was one of Europe's premier circuses. All illustrations are from the Jeanette Williams collection.

close, loving friend, but not as a spouse."

During their eight-year marriage, however, Jeanette learned plenty about nursing baby tigers, and through her 'strong personality' helped shape Gunther's future circus successes. Later overshadowed on the Amercian circus landscape by his dominating presence, Jeanette today has no regrets. "He has worked hard and tirelessly for his success. There's only one Gunther Gebel-Williams."

On the day that the late Irvin Feld finalized negotiations with Jeanette's mother, Frau Carola Williams, for the acquisition of Gunther and Jeanette's performing services, which served as the nucleus for today's Red Unit of the Greatest Show on Earth, the young equestrienne was in the hospital "negotiating" the birth of her daughter Caroline.

Long opposed to selling out their German circus interests, Jeanette had no enthusiasm for disbanding the family show when Feld, along with his money partner at the time, Judge Roy Hofheinz, came knocking on her mother's door with an offer in the late 1960s.

"Although we were working very hard, I was very proud of what we had accomplished with the show. Along with my mother and Gunther, we had created one of Europe's biggest and best circuses. I wasn't ready to give that all up for America. But Gunther wanted it and so did my mother."

"My mother wasn't well at the time, she needed a back operation, and Gunther was tired. We worked a tented season from March until October and then worked all winter indoors. He was ready for a change and the chance to go to America with Ringling really grabbed him."

Jeanette's divorce at the time from



Gunther also hastened the sale of Circus Williams. "My mother couldn't see the show continuing once Gunther and me separated."

In the late 1960s, despite their success, Circus Williams experienced difficult economic times. "Afternoon shows remained good," says Jeanette. "But evening business was no good. We were never sure why this happened, maybe it was television. The result was that it made profits increasingly difficult to come by. I think this, too, helped fuel my mother's enthusiasm for a change."

When the three sat down together and contemplated Feld's offer, Jeanette predictably voted against it. "I was obviously outvoted. They wanted it and that was that."

Although Ringling-Barnum publicity handouts for years have suggested that Circus Williams was bought outright by Feld in order to obtain the services of the now-legendary blond trainer, the German tenter was never actually "sold" to Ringling

ling.

"When the deal between my mother and Irvin Feld was finally concluded, we closed our show in 1968," says Jeanette.

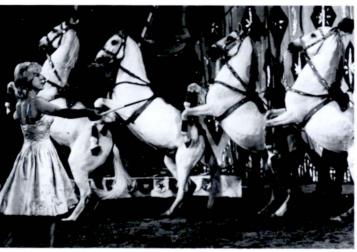
"Initially, we signed a five-year contract for the lease of the animals, and the acts of Gunther, and myself. We also brought along about twenty grooms who were included in the package. Our first season was 1969."

Three years after their arrival, a new lease contract was negotiated and the German troupe agreed to stay another five years. In 1976, four years into the second contract, the Circus Williams animals were finally sold to Ringling-Barnum. Today, with a few exceptions, the Gebel-Williams trained menagerie is all show-owned.

With the lease and ultimate sale of the Circus Williams animals, Frau Williams, however, still owned a lot of circus equipment. None of this was obtained by Feld in his original deal. "The story that he bought the circus to get Gunther was a publicity stunt," says an amused Jeanette. "It made for a good story and my mother went along with it."

Before Jeanette and Gunther's departure for America, they helped Jeanette's mother dismantle one of Europe's biggest circus operations.

There were many wagons, the big top, seats, front entrance, and all, that had to be sold. My mother knew then that she didn't want another circus. So, we sold everything. These were very sad days for all of us."



A young Jeanette Williams working liberty horses under the Circus Williams big top in the late 1960s.

One of the show's regular added attractions was a zoo, not unlike the old-time menageries once featured by American big tops. "We had to leave many of these animals behind in Germany, including some of the older elephants and one of my favorites, the ponies."

Many of the show's European-style wagons were sold to Jeanette's cousin, Franz, who used them to equip his own circus, Circus Williams-Althoff, which still operates in Germany. The Italian circus family, Togni, who have their own tented circus but are currently on tour with the Blue Unit of Ringling-Barnum, also purchased major equipment pieces, including the Circus Williams marquee, ticket wagon and light plant.

"Seeing all of those graceful wagons which I had grown up around and which represented the guts of my mother's hardearned circus success roll off the lot in Cologne was a very depressing experience. That was a day I shall never forget. It was the end of our family circus for good, and it hurt."

When Jeanette and Gunther's boat docked in New York on November 12, 1968, Gunther's new bride, Sigrid, was also on board as were the Circus Williams animals, including the Lipizzan liberty stallions and a herd of 12 full-grown elephants. Soon added to the original German herd were other elephants, including some from the defunct, England-based Chipperfield Circus. (With the retirement from the ring of Gunther, several of these elephants, including the Chipperfield ones, will reportedly be retired to the Ringling-Barnum elephant farm in Florida.)

In less than two months, beginning on January 6, 1969, their collected performing efforts were providing RinglingBarnum's new Red Unit with no less than eight acts featuring tigers, elephants, horses, and birds.

At the time, much was made in the press over Gunther's having both his ex-wife and current wife working side-by-side in the circus rings. Gunther himself even joked about it to reporters. But looking back, the subject understandably pains Jeanette.

"It's true that we worked together from 1969-1973 on the Red Unit. I did my Lipizzan act in center ring and Sigrid presented some liberty horses in an end ring.

"But I had many responsibilities then with the animals, so I tried to ignore the press stories and go about my business of performing, rehearsing, and caring for the animals.

"Remember, my mother still owned all the animals at the time, so Gunther and I were her eyes and ears on the Ringling show during these days. No question, though, there was tension between Sigrid and me. Two, strong-willed women are no small thing."

Along with her liberty act, comprised of six black, six bay, and six Arab stallions—later to be replaced with Amercian Morgan horses—Jeanette also presented Ringling-Barnum audiences with a bird act in "spec" and a dressage routine. In 1971, she even sat atop a white stallion while it was hoisted on a platform to the peak of the arena during finale.

The bird act originated at Circus Williams and was exported to America along with the other animals. "It was 'a nice little act' that the Felds fit into one of their productions. I think they used the act for a couple of years. One year, Mrs. Ben-Salem, the wife of one of Gunther's assistants, presented the act for a couple of seasons. After that, at Irvin Feld's request, I took over the act until it was permanently retired."

One day, the senior Feld came to Jeanette and told her that he wanted 100 birds in the act. He wanted enough trained birds to fill up an arena.

Unbeknownst to Feld, Jeanette didn't know a thing about training birds. Soon, though, she was immersed in birds, bird training, and all the mess that goes into keeping 100 pigeons as she feverishly labored during one short winter layoff to ready the act for Ringling-Barnum's upcoming "spec."

"Sue Lenz came to my rescue," says a heartily-laughing Jeanette, on the phone to this writer from her home in Sarasota, Florida. Obviously enjoying her memory of the experience, Jeanette remembers Sue Lenz--one-half of the veteran chimpanzee act, "The Rudi Lenz Chimps," a Ringling-Barnum mainstay for 10 years—hastily teaching her, while the Red Unit was still on the road, all about bird training.

"Years ago, Sue had a bird act in England. Her knowledge really saved me as Irvin was determined to have a big bird act and I didn't want to disappoint him."

Although Jeanette arrived in America with eighteen Lipizzan stallions, her act's size and members changed regularly during the ten years she worked liberty horses on Ringling-Barnum.

"Except for the winter seasons in the 1960s when we worked indoors in Italy, the animals were accustomed to working in the tent, where they performed on dirt. Even in the buildings, we put dirt on the floor to pad the ring.

"In America, though, you work on concrete floors over which they lay a rubber padding. Unfortunately, this considerably shortens the performing life of a horse and they have to be retired early. This, along with the constant travel by train, where they sometimes get stiff from standing for long periods, causes a trainer to make regular changes in the act.

"On the Ringling show, I used to call my liberty act the 'Unfinished Symphony.' Just as I would get the act in shape, a horse would begin having problems, as a result of the flooring, and I would have to replace him. This made presenting an act like mine almost impossible. You, of course, always strive for military-like perfection, but under these conditions it's not possible to control a big horse act. Quite simply, God meant for them to perform on dirt."

Constantly frustrated by the need to replace animals and train new horses, Jeanette's predicament was further aggrivated by the fact that there was only room on the train for one stand-by horse. "Without space to carry extra horses to train, the act was often short a compliment of all eighteen horses."

When she began working the act from

horseback, Jeanette reduced the act's size to 12 horses.

In 1978, Jeanette worked her liberty act on Ringling-Barnum for the last time. "At that point, the animals were all show-owned and management decided to sell the animals to a Mexican circus. I was totally opposed to this, but, regardless, they were sold. I later heard that they didn't do very well in Mexico and that the act never survived."

With her marriage to single trapeze artist Elvin Bale, who she met on the Ringling-Barnum circus in 1973, Jeanette became intimately familiar with the life and training of an aerial artist. Slowly, Elvin introduced her to his performing specialties, and she eventually became a part of his "Wheel of Death" giant wheel act on the Blue Unit, the first of several such acts featured on Ringling-Barnum.

The wheel act was Jeanette's first and only association with a circus aerial act. "It was a great challenge for me and something radically different from what I was used to."

Elvin and Jeanette worked the act together on Ringling-Barnum beginning in the mid-1970s. They continued working the act on the Feld-sponsored, one-ring Monte Carlo circus before departing the Ringling-Barnum organization in 1980 following tours of Australia and Japan.

While married to Elvin and living on the road in their much-publicized, custom-appointed luxury bus—they divorced in 1982--Jeanette helped the English-born and muscularly-bound aerialist to develop other sensational acts.

"I've always had a strong personality," she quickly volunteers. "I wasn't bashful about motivating him to create other acts because I knew he had a great deal of potential

"When I met Elvin, he had one act, the single trapeze, a cape and a used Cadillac," she adds. "When we parted com-

Jeanette Williams and her Lipizzan stallions on the Ringling-Barnum Blue unit.

pany, he had four acts, a big salary, and many benefits."

During their years together, Jeanette only worked in the wheel act but helped guide and manage the other Bale acts, including a rocket ship act which was reminiscent of the famous, old Zacchini cannon act.

Before the two divorced, Jeanette, at Elvin's urging, had opened a restaurant in Venice, Florida, where the couple owned a house and where Ringling-Barnum has winter-quartered since pulling up stakes in Sarasota many years ago.

"Leaving Ringling when I did was fine with me. I've always been a firm believer in quitting while you're on top. In the circus business, it's sad to see aging performers, who were once major headliners with a big show, struggling to make a living on some small show many years after they should have retired. That to me is a terrible come down, and I was determined that it wouldn't happen to me.

"Gunther and I share the same philosophy. That's why he's leaving now, to preserve his dignity and to be remembered as having left at the top of his business.

"Right after leaving Ringling in 1980, we opened the restaurant. It was small and intimate, but we served excellent food and created a good business. It was called the Continental Cafe. Although I missed the circus, I enjoyed the restaurant business and many of our circus friends patronized it during the winter, so I kept in touch with the business."

After her divorce from Elvin, Jeanette decided to sell the restaurant. "It was something Elvin wanted to do," she says. "When our marriage was over and I was left to run it alone, it didn't hold the same appeal for me."

In 1982, Jeanette spent most of the year commuting between her home in Sarasota, where she now lives, and Cologne, Germany, where her mother, still considered very much a local dignitary and celebrity, lived.

"My mother was preparing to finally sell the Cologne winter quarters of Circus Williams. After disbanding the circus in 1968, she held on to this property until negotiating its sale in 1982. Emotionally, this was a very difficult time for both of us as the winter quarters represented our last connection to Circus Williams."

Always convinced that a woman could do anything a man could as she later proved by creating the huge Circus Williams operation--which at its peak travelled on 180 European-style, railroad flat cars--Carola Williams, after closing the circus, remained an active member of her beloved Cologne. Living alone in her memory-filled, luxury apartment, she was a much sought after guest at town func-



tions and was fondly remembered by its citizenry for her generous funding of a rebuilt school and newly-constructed hos-

pital wing following the war.

"She also loved to travel," adds Jeanette. "From the time she sold the circus, she traveled all over the world, visiting places she never before had time to see like Egypt and Africa. She was a great crossword puzzle enthusiast, too. She would sit for hours playing with her puzzles."

"When she finally sold the winter quarters," Jeanette amusingly remembers, "all I heard about were the taxes." Forever the astute busineswoman, Frau Williams endlessly worried about how much tax would be levied against her sale of the valuable winter quarter grounds.

In 1986, following a series of illnesses that diminished both her feisty spirit and boundless energy, Carola Althoff Williams, one of Europe's last reigning circus matriarchs, died quietly in Cologne.

In a tribute to her stature as a fallen but prominent member of "circus royalty," the European circus community turned out in force for a final salute to the diminutive diva of the big top. At Jeanette's side during the moving tribute to her mother was Gunther Gebel-Williams, for whom the highly-disciplined and determined Carola had paved the way to circus immortality.

Today, Jeanette looks at the circus business and notices the disappearance of many traditions.

"It's tough going for circuses today. In Germany, for instance, we have over 120 shows, and all of them struggle to make it. Animal rights fanatics are as aggressive there as they are here.

"On Circus Krone in Germany, for instance, Christel Sembach-Krone has had the same giraffe on exhibit for nineteen years. All of a sudden, the animal rights people claim that the giraffe shouldn't be with the circus, suggesting that it's not being properly cared for. That's ridiculous. The Krones are first-class animal trainers for many, many years and a giraffe isn't going to survive for nineteen years without proper care."

Asked about the lack of big liberty horse acts in most circuses today, Williams is quick to respond.

"It's very sad to see so few acts of this type around today. In the last ten years, their numbers have diminished significantly. There are several good reasons why liberty acts are few and far between, except, perhaps, on the bigger shows like Ringling.

"Very few producers will pay the necessary money for this kind of act. Consequently, a trainer can't make it on the money they're offered. Food and transportation for a 12 horse liberty act is very expensive today and the independent liberty act just can't survive anymore. A



Williams working the bird act in the Ringling-Barnum spec.

trainer can get as much money for a four or six horse act as he or she can get for a 12 horse act, so why bother with a bigger act?

"Also, there are very few good trainers left. In my opinion, the best trainer in the world today is Circus Knie's Freddie Knie, Jr. He's gentle and communicates well with the animals. And he's very ambitious, training long hours every day. In the U. S., it's Albert Ostermaier for dressage.

"For sheer showmanship, however, I think my cousin Franz Althoff has the best liberty act from a public point of view. His act features 12 Holland Friesen horses, and the sight of them together, working in unison, is enough to give you goose bumps."

Pausing to reflect on her own life, Jeanette fondly remembers her English-born father, who she remembers "from a little girl's point of view."

"He was a kindly, gentle man, who told great stories. He loved us kids, and was a fastidious dresser, a real 'Beau Brummel'. When he died, I remember naively asking my mother what we were going to do with all of his suits."

"Everyone who knew him loved him. My mother, who was a lot more conservative with the money, once said that she wished she had on one table all the money my father gave away in one year. He was the kind of guy who would literally hand you the shirt off his back if you said you liked it."

According to Jeanette, Harry Williams was a gourmet cook, who, during his

youth, toured the world as a chef on a merchant marine ship. "He was also very bright. I remember that he fluently spoke nine languages, including Russian and Chinese.

"At night, after the show, he loved to play cards with the other men, and kept in a secret possum belly such gourmet treats as caviar which he brought out for these occasions."

Among Harry Williams' performing specialties were horses, although he presented other species, too.

"My father loved to practice early in the morning, around 6 AM, when no one was around and there was no noise. He trained and performed in every kind of a horse act. He worked with bareback, comedy, trick riding, Roman chariot racing, liberty, dressage, and basket horses. He taught Gunther about all of these acts."

During its heyday, according to Jeanette, Circus Williams innovated the use of a high-domed, oblong tent which allowed for an expanded seating capacityupwards of 4,000 people—and an ovalshaped performing area.

"We always remained a traditional, one-ring European-style circus, but during the Wild West presentation, Roman chariot racing, and, later in the program, the elephant act, we removed the standard-size ring, which left an enormous oval area in which to perform. With over a dozen elephants working at once, we needed the space."

Unlike American family shows, the Circus Williams, due to its size and reputation, never solely relied on family members to supply the talent.

"My mother never liked that idea. She always wanted a well-rounded program, and, as a result, we always featured a number of independent acts, everything from tumblers to crocodiles."

During her early years in America, Jeanette longed for a return to her European roots. She still prefers the European format in circuses to the American version, and will always consider the Circus Williams years the best in her big top career. When it comes to everyday living, however, Jeanette is pleased to live in America, where she anxiously awaits her citizenship.

"If, four or five years after closing Circus Williams, I had returned to Germany, it would have been possible to restart the circus. Most of the hundred-and-fifty people who worked for us-some for over thirty years--were still around and eager to go back on the road.

"When we came to the Ringling show, I missed being in management of the show. I liked calling the shots, making decisions. I loved the feeling that I helped establish something.

"One man, who was our mechanic for

many years, went to work for Mercedes Benz in Cologne after we left for America. For a long time afterward, he would call Cologne winter quarters every week to see how Gunther and me were doing, hoping, of course, that we would eventually come home and start the circus again.

Today, most of these people are either very old or have died. Consequently, it would no longer be possible to open a circus. The economic climate for circuses there is not like it used to be and it would be very tough to start all over again with a new staff. The name lives on with my cousin Franzie Althoff's Circus Williams-Althoff, which has been touring under canvas since he returned to Germany from the Ringling show."

With her circus days now firmly behind her, Jeanette lives alone in a house of her design in Sarasota, Florida, where she cherishes fond memories of her big top days and puts forth great enthusiasm for

her more recent projects.

In Orlando, Florida, at the Arabian Nights attraction, Jeanette's daughter, Caroline, now 22 years-old and once known backstage as "Pinky" to many circus visitors, has matured into a beautiful young horsewoman.

Presenting both dressage and liberty horses, much like her mother once did, Caroline will next year be the proud owner of a Holland Friesen horse, which was purchased for her this year by Jeanette and is now undergoing ring training in Holland.

"Friesens are among the world's most beautiful horses, so regal and stunning with their rich, black coats. They're certainly my favorites."

Although Gebel-Williams' son, Mark Gebel, has been apprenticing under his famous father, no male blood relative of the Williams family remains to carry on the family's animal training traditions.

Franz Althoff, a nephew of Carola Williams, is the only active family member still operating a major circus. According to Jeanette, Althoff has proven to be an innovative circus manager in recent years, and has streamlined European circus travel with the design of a special menagerie-performing tent combination, zoo-like pen areas for the animals, and a container loading system for the traintransported circus equipment.

Today, Franz tours his circus in Sweden all summer under the title Circus Scott, one of Europe's most venerable circus names. The elderly owner, one of Carola Williams' closest, lifetime friends, has turned the show over to her son who supplies the name and business administration while Franz supplies the equipment and show. During the winter, Franz then

tours his circus, heated tent and all, in Germany.

At one time, Franz's father and Jeanette's uncle, Adolf Althoff, owned his own circus, too, and for a time in the 1960s was in partnership with Carola, helping to operate two Williamsbankrolled circuses, Circus Williams and the smaller, Circus Frederike Hagenbeck.

While no relation to the Hagenbecks, Adolf and Carola leased the name for a few years until the brother-sister business combine no longer could survive, says Jeanette, given the often-clashing personalities of the two, intense Althoff siblings.



Williams and her former husband Elvin Bale on Ringling-Barnum's Blue unit. Also pictured is her daughter Caroline.

Not long after, Adolf left for the Ringling show, returning in the late 1960s to Germany, where he opened a safari park. When Franz rejoined his father in Germany after the Ringling show, they soon sold the park and opened Circus Williams-Althoff in 1975.

Her other cousin, Harry Althoff, son of the late Franz Althoff, Carola's other brother, was a prominent elephant trainer, just like his father, but had to quit the circus in recent years due to severe back problems. In the 1970s, he appeared with Circus Barum and also with Circus Knie.

"Harry was a wonderful trainer," says Jeanette. "His father taught both him and Gunther all about elephant training and they're both about the same age. It's interesting how differently each of their careers turned out."

Today, Harry lives in Germany as a landlord, permanently retired from the

Two other Althoff circuses operate in Germany, but, reportedly, neither show is a favorite of the Althoff-Williams clan. Asked to explain the relationship, Jeanette hesitates at volunteering details.

"Many years ago," she finally admits, "my mother sued this side of the family, who are only distantly related. For many years, they were never in the circus business, then, suddenly, they began operating a show in Germany. My mother was very unhappy about this because she felt the quality of their show was not up to her family's standards. She took them to court to try and stop their use of the Althoff name. Of course, she lost."

In addition to Gebel-Williams, Circus Williams has helped launched other wellknown careers, including that of Ringling-Barnum's Charly Baumann.

I remember Charly when I was a very young child," says Jeanette. "He was what we call in Germany a 'Bereiter,' which is a notch below an apprenctice. There's no real word for it in English. They lead horses, clean stalls, and serve an allaround function. Charly did this for my father. Gunther was also with the show then, as a full-fledged apprentice.

"After the accident and my father's death, Charly left our show in 1951 because my mother shut it down for a year. He went to work presenting wild animal acts for a guy named Eric Klant, a wellknown supplier in those days of animal acts to circuses."

Later, of course, Baumann ended up on Circus Busch Roland, which is still in operation, presenting a show-owned tiger act. In 1965, John Ringling North hired the act and Baumann for the Ringling show, where it remained for over two decades.

According to insiders, Baumann never owned the act. Ada Aureden, the thenowner of Circus Busch Roland and allegedly a lover at the time of Baumann's, leased it to North and later sold it to the Ringling circus. Reportedly, she refused to sell Baumann the act after he jilted her for a Spanish showgirl to whom he remains married today.

(Ironically, it was reported in mid-1990 by the American news wire services that Circus Busch, based in East Germany and no relation to Busch Roland, was so destitute for money, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent withdrawal of government support for its operating overhead, that several menagerie lions had to be killed in order to conserve feed expenses.)

With enough memories and stories to fill a book, or two, Jeanette Williams clearly enjoys a look back on the life of her one-time circus family. "While I feel that I'm too old to perform," she says. "You're never to old to savor the memories."

Gone is her beloved mother, Carola, who died on December 12, 1986, at the age of eightyfour. Gone, too, is her brother, Alphons, who was killed at the age of 19 in a 1961 car accident, two years after joining the family circus, fresh from German boarding school. Also gone are any sustaining ties to her homeland, Germany. The remaining circus winter quarters in Cologne was sold to the popular Circus Roncalli, whose owner, circus clown Bernhard Paul, has brightly painted and decorated the grounds and build-

ings, and, according to Jeanette, "collected enough old circus memorabilia there to soon start a museum." Despite her retirement from the ring, Jeanette Williams remains a proud and passionate figure on the landscape of contemporary circus history. Her family's 200 year-old roots in the circus remain firmly implanted in her eveyday being.

"My mother always said that as long as there were children there would always be a circus. I think she was right, despite the problems being caused today by animal rights activists. Where else are our young people going to see these animals in all their magnificence?

"You look at television today and you wonder why people would bother to picket the circus, when the circus strives to deliver good clean family entertain-



Williams' liberty act on Ringling-Barnum. Her original stallions were replaced over time with American Morgan horses.

ment while TV has mostly garbage on it.I only hope the circus survives for future generations.

Of recent, Jeanette has become the volunteer vice-president of the Sarasota Circus Festival. "I'm working very hard along with many other generous people to help create a meaningful festival, based on Sarasota's long association with the circus. It's an uphill battle and we don't yet have much funding but I'm confident that it can grow into something really big."

Between the festival and the staging of small circus shows at several fairs, Jeanette is developing her circus production and talent business and expanding her interest in animal import-export ventures. She's also involved in animal breeding programs.

"When I retired my cheetah act from Ringling in 1979, I donated the animals to the Columbus, Ohio, zoo, where they became the nucleus for a very successful breeding program that continues to this day."

She also exported and personally accompanied two white tigers to Germany, the first white tigers ever located there. They currently make their home at the Hollywood Safari Park, a 20 year-old wildlife park. Most recently,

reports Jeanette, three white tigers were born there.

"My life today," she wryly admits, "is a far cry from the Circus Williams days. My mother was hard to work for, and we did everything from selling tickets, beginning at 9 AM, to mailing out flyers for school shows in the next town. All for very little money. Sometimes, I was so busy in the ticket wagon that they had to bring my horse to the side door of the wagon on the midway, so, at the last minute, I could jump in the saddle and go like hell to the back door for my act." The thought of that oft-repeated scene makes her laugh loudly and heartily.

Still the charismatic circus artist, equestrienne Jeanette Williams remains a vital link to the circus world's past, present and future.



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he roll-call of circus impresarios in the first half of the nineteenth century is a list of almost constant success. Men such as Richard Sands, Avery Smith, Nathan Howes, Seth B. Howes, James Raymond, Aaron Turner, the Mabie brothers, John June and Lewis Titus represent a long parade of profitable field show operation. Not one of these men ever reported what might be termed a failed season.

There were accidents, of course, and riots and the loss of valuable property, and there were seasons of little or no profits. However, they were never put in a position where their shows failed financially and none of them withdrew from exhibiting because of external factors. This is an amazing record in the light of the experiences of showmen in the late nineteenth century.

John M. Kelly, the attorney, in his famous brief seeking a reduction of inheritance taxes for the estates of Henry and Alf T. Ringling, offered a long list of failed circuses. He used the phrase "Of the overwhelming majority of circuses it may be said that they were failures." He included in his brief the names of over a hundred shows that he termed to be unsuccessful in the sense that they came to have no intrinsic value. Once the owner or owners departed, according to Kelly, there was nothing of worth

Kelly couldn't have written that brief in 1860, as there were not enough examples of failure to prove his point. This is not to say that there were none, but they were so few that when we find one it is of unusual interest. Such a situation arose in 1853, and it happened to one of the most successful of the managers of the period, Rufus Welch. It is his misadventure in that year that is our topic.

In 1853 Welch was in his twenty-sixth year as a showman. He was fifty-two years old and had just finished a successful season in which he had two circuses on the road. Since 1845 he had been the leading circus impresario in America. Even his western rival, Gilbert R. Spalding, admitted that in 1849 Welch stood at the peak of the profession.<sup>2</sup>

Born in New Berlin, New

### RUFUS WELCH'S WORST SEASON

#### By Stuart Thayer

York, Welch first entered the record as a menagerie manager in 1827. By 1832 he was a partner in a firm that eventually became well-known under the title Purdy, Welch and Macomber. These gentlemen were part of the Boston Zoological Association which imported large shipments of animals from Africa in 1833, 1834 and 1835. They were also members of the Zoological Institute from 1835 to 1837.

All this establishes Welch as being among the leaders of field show operators at the time of collapse of the Zoological Institute. Zebedee Macomber and Eisenhart Purdy retired when the Institute went under, and we assume it was their money that had funded the firm of Purdy, Welch & Macomber, as Welch was un-

Wood block poster used by Welch's Parisian Hippodrome in 1853. Circus World Museum collection.

able to continue in the menagerie busi-ness without them. It was at this point that he turned to circus management, a much less capital-intensive branch of outdoor entertainment.

He had a variety of partners over the twenty years that followed his move from the animal business. Men such as Jonas Bartlett, Alvah Mann, William Delavan and John J. Nathans allied themselves with

Welch in the various circus titles he presented to the public.

Beginning in 1845 Welch had two circuses on the road each season. The larger one was titled Welch & Mann for five years and then was called Welch's National Circus for seven more. The smaller show was known by a variety of names—Welch & Delavan, Welch, Delavan & Nathans and Welch & Nathans—as partners came and went.

By having two circuses Welch could practically dominate the business in New York and New England. While one show toured those areas the other could visit the rich Ohio territory. In the East his opposition was Richard Sands and Avery Smith and in the West it was Gilbert Spalding.

Welch's major circus, the National, was named after the National Theatre in Philadelphia, which he leased for twelve

years. At the end of each road season he produced a winter show at the National, and in fact he dominated the circus business of that city.

Welch made a lot of money, and apparently put it all back into the business.. He was once quoted as saying that though he had made over a million dollars with his shows, he had also spent a great deal upon them.3 His larger circus had the most performers of any on the road, rivalling Gilbert R. Spalding. It was not unusual for Welch to have twenty or twenty-five athletes at a time when most circuses had but eight or nine.

With all this, his fortunes took a terrible turn in 1853 in what can only be described as a disastrous season, one of those times that are defined by the modern apothegm that says "if something can go wrong it usually will."

It was in 1853 that Fran-



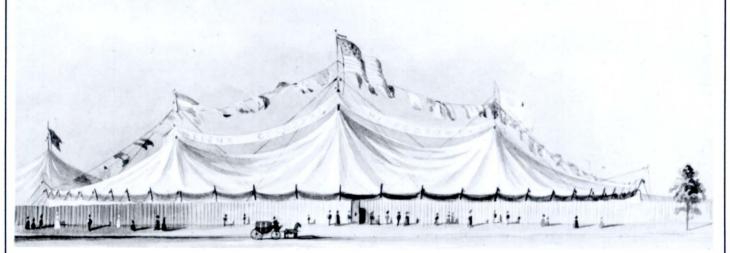
left.

coni's Hippodrome opened in New York, the property of Richard Sands, Avery Smith, Seth B. Howes and Gerard C. Quick. The hippodrome idea, born in Paris and successful in London, was expected to be a crowd-pleaser in America. Based on the idea of a race track under canvas with circus acts in the infield, it was certainly novel. The races were of every kind imaginable—horses, elephants, camels, chariots—the idea being that these competitions on a fifth of a mile track would create excitement in the audience. In addition a great pageant involving hundreds of performers was part of the program.

Franconi name on his rival's hippodrome. Unfortunately, the first of Welch's disappointments that season was the defection of the Soulier contingent. They decided not to come to America. So, here was Welch with a huge tent, and his American performers under contract and no horses. The Souliers were to have provided the animals. As we said, Welch had two circuses on tour in each year through 1852, but he had apparently decided to confine his activities to the Hippodrome for 1853, thus he had no place to put the performers. His solution was to frame a small show under his Welch's National

tion gang in Somerset, Ohio, the westward journey of the Parisian Hippodrome was seemingly uneventful and presumably prosperous. They reached St. Louis on November 10 and performed for a week on what was known as the Lucas Lot, present site of the Federal Building.

Some businessmen of the city tendered Welch a banquet on November 16, honoring him for bringing his big eastern show to St. Louis. It was actually the first time a Welch-owned circus had ever been there. The banquet was the last good thing that happened to the showman that season.



That men with the reputation of Sands and his partners would seize on the idea certainly caught the attention of other circus owners. Dan Rice, James M. June and Levi J. North all added the word "hippodrome" to their titles in 1853, though we have no evidence that any of them had the track that typified the genre. The name is still with us, of course, and today every circus with more than one ring typically has a hippodrome track.

Welch, hearing of the Franconi venture, decided to frame a hippodrome of his own. He ordered what may have been the largest tent manufactured to that time., Several contemporary observers say it was the largest tent they had ever seen.4 Both Welch's and Franconi's tents were oblong in shape, whereas conventional forms were round. They each claimed a capacity of over four thousand persons. A Philadelphia writer reported that Welch had first ordered an even larger tent than the one he used, but felt that the sightlines would be too long for audience viewing. Welch claimed in his ads that the tent covered two acres.

A group of American performers was hired, but the main attraction was to be the Soulier Troupe from France. The Soulier Circus was a leading French institution of the day, and Welch no doubt expected them to offset the lure of the

Watercolor drawing of the tent used by Welch's Parisian Hippodrome in 1853. Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Circus title and send it out while he reorganized. The circus went into Virginia and Washington and Baltimore.

Welch rented a building in Philadelphia and proceeded to acquire and train horses for the contemplated tour. By June 30 Welch's Parisian Hippodrome was ready. The small show had returned to Philadelphia and the big tent was raised on the land where the Academy of Music now stands, the corner of Broad and Locust Streets.

They played four weeks in Philadelphia to generally positive reviews. Then they took to the road, moving west through Pennsylvania, Ohio and Kentucky. They played the cities one would expect them to on such a route, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati, Lexington and Louisville.

The Franconi Hippodrome's travelling unit also visited Ohio, but because of their early season foray into New England they were a month behind Welch in most cities.

With the exception of a clem involving circus personnel and a railroad construc-

The plan was to travel from St. Louis to New Orleans by steamboat, performing in the river towns en route. This meant that the baggage stock was superflous, so they were shipped to New Orleans to be sold. One might question as to why the horses weren't sold in St. Louis. The answer lies in the fact that they would bring a higher price in the South, because of the lack of good pasture in that region. Horses brought up on northern grass tended to be heavier and healthier. As it turned out, Welch would have been better off if he had peddled the animals in St. Louis because the agent they were assigned to in New Orleans sold them and kept the money.

The steamboat that the company leased was apparently owned by persons who indulged in dubious business practices. At several cities where the Hippodrome performed local sheriffs placed liens on the craft for unpaid bills from previous voyages. Needing to keep up with his advertising Welch couldn't spend a lot of time arguing these cases, so he was required to pay off the liens in order to proceed on his route. This drained him of a considerable sum of money.

We use Welch's name as if he was still with the company, but it appears he did not accompany the troupe beyond St. Louis. Suffering from the rheumatism

and gout that was to bring on his death in 1856, he had returned to Philadelphia and taken to his bed. This could very well account for some of the problems that beset the show. He turned the management over to Hiram Franklin, who had been the equestrian director. Franklin was an accomplished performer, having had twenty years in the business, but he was without signifigant managerial experience.

The show reached New Orleans on 3 December and proceeded to set up on a square between Erato and Clio Streets. After performing for a few days it was discovered that the lot was too wet to support the performances in their best light. They then moved at some expense to Baronne Street, between Poydras and Hevia. Performances on the new, more solid lot began on December 13.

In addition to this problem, while the Hippodrome was in New Orleans the steamboat burned at its berth. It was uninsured so it quite likely became Welch's obligation to reimburse the owners.

Franklin moved the company to Mobile, Alabama, where a suitable lot was procurred, but misfortune still dogged the undertaking. This time it was the weather. It turned very cold in January in Mobile and this affected attendance to the point where Welch's Parisian Hippodrome seemed a lost cause.

From his sick-bed Welch told Franklin to turn the property over to the employees, who could then operate it as a cooperative venture, sharing income and expense between them. Still using Welch's title, and his advertising cuts, the company proceeded overland to Columbus, Georgia and from there to Macon and Savannah. They were able to make a little money as they hired a steamboat in Savannah to haul them to Charleston, which they reached on February 13, 1854. Here they played one week and then threw in the towel.

Hiram Franklin delivered the remnants of the company to Rufus Welch in Philadelphia. All that was left of the original investment, launched with such optimism in June, 1853, were eight horses.

Perhaps the saddest part of this devastating adventure was that Rufus Welch never recovered from it. We don't know how much money he lost, but we do know that he took Lewis B. Lent in as a partner in 1854 and for the next three seasons Lent managed the concern, which was known as Welch & Lent. Lent was the managing partner and as far as we now know, Welch had no hand in the operation. Lent may well have paid Welch something for the use of his name. Welch's illness kept him from an active role. This man, who only four years pre-

vious had stood at the pinnacle of the business, last had his name before the public in April, 1856. Rufus Welch died in Philadelphia on November 29, 1856.

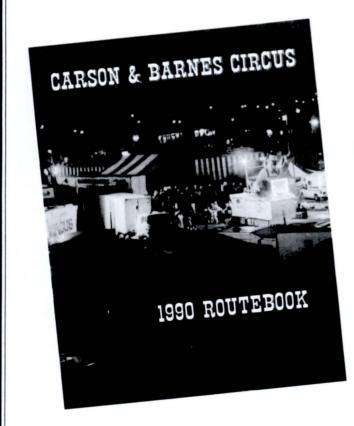
We have recited here what we know of the Parisian Hippodrome. A few newspaper advertisements survive to mark it, and there is one more artifact, one that many readers have seen, probably without knowing what it was. In the Irvin Feld Exhibit Hall at the Circus World Museum one of the largest posters on exhibit is from Welch's Parisian Hippodrome. That big, printed bill is our only relic of Rufus Welch's disastrous season of 1853.

Some of this material came from a clipping from an unidentified Philadelphia newspaper in the Chindahl files, Circus World Museum.

(This paper was presented at the 1990 CHS convention.)

#### **FOOTNOTES**

- l. Fred D. Pfening, III, ed., "The Taxable Value of Circus Goodwill," by John M. Kelly, (*Bandwagon*, xii: 1 (1968), p. 6.)
- 2. Interview with Gilbert R. Spalding, St. Louis Republican, 1 February 1880.
- 3. James Reese, New York Clipper, 10 March 1883, p. 1.
- 4. An example is the editorial statement in the *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis), ll November 1853.

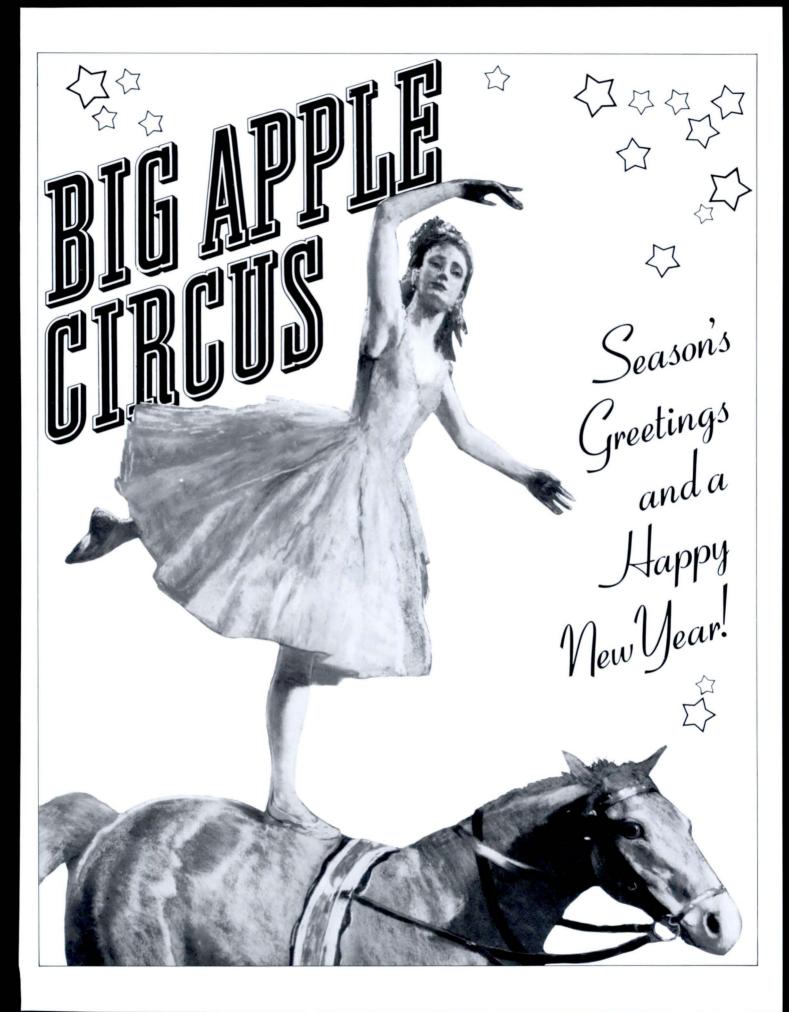


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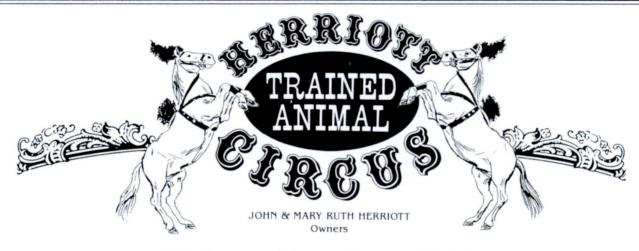
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THE LAND OF LITTLE HORSES, GETTYSBURG, PA

#### HOLIDAY GREETINGS

To all our circus friends

John and Mary Ruth Herriott

## HOMOSY GARRINGS

and Best Wishes

Jos and Marion McRamon

n the first edition of his autobiography, published ■ in 1854, the great showman P. T. Barnum recounts with considerable gusto how he set about promoting a little "woolly horse," one of the more notorious episodes in his early career as the self-proclaimed "Prince of Humbugs" and one which he thought best to omit from later editions of the autobiography. While touring with his famous midget Tom Thumb in the summer of 1848, he writes, he saw such an animal being exhibited in Cincinnati and found it to be a "veritable curiosity." "It was a well-formed horse of rather

small size, without any mane or the slightest portion of hair upon his tail. The entire body and limbs were covered with a thick fine hair or wool curling tight to his skin. He was foaled in Indiana, was a mere freak of nature, and withal a very curious-looking animal. I purchased him and sent him to Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he was placed quietly away in a retired barn, until such time as I might have use for him."

Opportunity soon arrived when alarming reports began reaching the east that Colonel John C. Fremont (later to make a run for the Presidency) had become lost and possibly died while leading a surveying expedition in the Rocky Mountains. He was soon declared to be safe, however, and it was while the nation's interest in this popular hero was at its peak that Barnum decided to bring forth his "curiosity." Advertised as having been captured by Fremont and his men after an arduous three-day chase and sent east as a present to the Ú. S. Quartermaster, "Col. Fremont's Nondescript or Woolly Horse," as the animal was billed, was said to be "extremely complex--made up of the El-

ephant, Deer, Horse, Buffalo, Camel, and Sheep" and was additionally said to be capable of bounding twelve or fifteen feet into the air. For his advertisements, too, Barnum commissioned a sensational woodcut depicting the horse being pursued by Fremont's party and leaping across a yawning chasm. "If the nondescript had made the fearful leap here represented," the showman laughingly wrote of the illustration, "he would have jumped not less than five miles."

The horse was exhibited at twenty-five cents a head, first in New York and then in

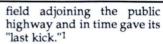
# R L Bornum's "Woolly Horse"s Truth Is Indeed Sometimes Stranger Than Fiction

By A. H. Saxon

Copyright © 1989 by A. H. Saxon

other cities. In Washington, however, a ruckus blew up when Senator Thomas Hart Benton, Fremont's father-in-law, had Barnum's agent arrested for taking money from him under false pretenses. But since Fremont had never written to his fatherin-law to say he had not captured such a horse, the case was thrown out of court and only added to people's desire to see this marvelous creature. "The public appetite was craving something tangible from Col. Fremont," Barnum writes. "The community was absolutely famishing. They were ravenous. They could have swallowed any thing, and like a good genius, I threw them, not a 'bone,' but a regular tit-bit, a bon-bon--and they swallowed it at a single gulp!" After a few more days of being exhibited, the showman continues, the horse was taken back to Bridgeport, where it was retired to a

Barnum's woodcut showing the woolly horse making its fearful five-mile leap. From the first edition of the showman's autobiography.



Barnum's reluctance to repeat this gloating tale in later editions of his biography has served to confirm the almost universal belief that the whole thing was a colossal fraud from start to finish. Friends and foes alike taunted him with the "little woolly horse" until the end of his life-one enemy, the irascible James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the New York Herald, sarcastically took to calling the showman himself "Woolly Horse Barnum"--and as recently as

1989 a journalist writing in Yankee Magazine confidently dismissed the horse as "a tired nag covered with dyed cotton." And although Barnum himself, as will be noted in the above account, described the horse as a "veritable curiosity," he obviously considered it nothing more than a "mere freak of nature," as indeed were many of the other "curiosities," both animal and human, he exhibited around this

And so thought I, until the summer of 1988, when I received a telephone call from a researcher named David Gaier. Mr. Gaier was then an intern with the C. S. Fund, a California-based foundation one of whose objectives is the preserving of genetic diversity. The project he was working on had to do with the rare North American breed known as the "curly" horse, specimens of which are sometimes discovered running wild in the West, while others have been introduced by breeders into their herds in the attempt to improve blood lines and pass on some of the "curly's" characteristics. These last generally include superb stamina, a good disposition, and the ability to endure the

harshest winter conditions, not to mention the distinctive curly coat itself. Of course, with such crossbreeding it becomes increasingly difficult to find examples of the "pure" curly; and one aim of the C. S. Fund's project was the attempt to identify the distinguishing characteristics of the breed through blood studies, illustrations, and written oral and scriptions, some of which date back to the beginning of the 19th century. The original American curly appears to have been smaller than its descendants, for ex-



ample, to have been covered fairly uniformly with tightly curled hair, and to have had little or no hair on its tail, while its mane was quite short or entirely absent.

Theories as to where the breed originated and how it reached North America are widely divergent. It is popularly believed that the North American curly is somehow related to the "Bashkir" horse found in Russia, though in fact, as the C.S. Fund has established through its contacts with Russian scientific and agricultural organizations, this belief is in error, since Bashkir horses are not noted for curly hair. But there is another breed of Russian horse, known as "Lokai," that does possess the characteristic and is found and bred in the mountainous region of Tadzhikistan, next to Afghanistan. At any rate, whether descended from Bashkir or Lokai horses, one school would have it that American curlys are of Russian origin, having either been brought to the continent by early Russian fur traders or imported toward the end of the 19th century by a Nevada rancher named Tom Dixon. The trouble with these two theories is that the extant records of the Russian trading companies contain no mention of horses; while depictions of curly horses are found in North American Indian "pictographs"--the so-called "Winter Counts"-dating back to the beginning of the last century. If curly horses were not introduced by Russians or by Dixon, then, might their hardy ancestors have found their own way here, crossing the land bridge over the Bering Strait in pre-historic times, say, and somehow managing to survive when other North American horses became extinct around 8,000 years ago? This theory, which also has its advocates, is certainly an intriguing one, but to date no paleontological evidence has been found to support it.

There are several other ideas concerning the origin of the curly horse in the New World, one of them being the distinct possibility that the breed is an indigenous mutation that, like the "Rex" breed of cat, has arisen coincidentally in more than one location. But the one that led Mr. Gaier to contact me might be

termed the "Spanish connection," since it turns out curly horses have also been reported in South America from the late 18th century on, particularly in the Plata region of Paraguay and northern Argentina. In an 1868 work entitled The States of the River Plate, for example, an English traveler to that region, one Wilfred Latham, describes such horses as follows: "It is not uncommon to see horses with crisp curled hair all over, something like the 'wool' of a negro's head: occasionally whole manadas [herds] are filled with such horses. I should suppose that it was one of this singular race that Barnum exhibited in the 'States.' These horses have scarcely any mane, and little or no hair on the tail. I have not been able to ascertain the origin of this peculiarity in horseflesh."3

As might be expected, the oblique reference to Barnum in this account intrigued Mr. Gaier, who attempted, without success, to run down the story in later editions of the showman's autobiography. He did manage to locate me, however, after learning that I had written a biography of Barnum; and in response to his query I immediately got out my first edition of the autobiography and read to him over the telephone Barnum's own description of his little "woolly horse." It was a perfect description of the American curly, Mr. Gaier delightedly informed me, which also seemed to rule out the notion that Tom Dixon had been responsible for introducing the breed sometime after 1880. I must confess that I was as surprised as he was, for until then I was unaware of the existence of such a breed and had simply assumed, as had Barnum, that his example was a "mere freak of nature."4

So it appears there was more to the little "woolly horse" than was suspected by Barnum and his contemporaries--or, for that matter, by his biographers till now. As was true of several other "veritable curiosities" he exhibited during his career, the outrageous publicity surrounding it served to obscure its true merits and significance. Undoubtedly, too, it will strike some readers as ironic that what seems to be the earliest written description we

have of the curly horse in North America should come to us courtesy of the notorious "Prince of Humbugs"! To date I have not run across any additional information on Barnum's horse, but as the showman writes he was foaled in Indiana, he was obviously not an import and may well have been descended from some of those curlys depicted by the Plains Indians in their "Winter Counts."

For those wishing further information on this breed of horse, the results of the C. S. Fund's year-long project have been summarized in a published report by Shan Thomas entitled Myth and Mystery: The Curly Horse in America (C. S. Fund, 1989), which includes many interesting illustrations and photographs of curly horses. Much of the above regarding the breed's possible origin has been taken from this source, which also mentions curly haired horses in European nations (including Spain) other than Russia. A fuller, more technical report, geared to experts, is also planned. The Foundation's address is 469 Bohemian Highway, Freestone, California 95472.

#### Footnote

- 1. The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself (New York: Redfield, 1855), pp. 349-51. On the subject of the various editions of Barnum's autobiography, including the actual publication date of the first edition, see the first chapter of the author's P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
- 2. James Dodson, "The Myth Who Was the Man," Yankee (September 1989), p. 150. The author of this article, described as the "Senior Writer" for Yankee magazine, traveled to Connecticut to interview the present writer, who is quoted and misquoted ad libitum in the article and who certainly never furnished the absurd tale of the horse. James Gordon Bennett himself, it should here be noted, later insisted the exhibiting of the horse in Washington had been prohibited by court decree--see P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man, pp. 10-11 and note.
- 3. Second edition (London: Longmans, Green), p. 52.
- 4. Here I should perhaps point out that the present information concerning Barnum's woolly horse came to light after my biography of the showman had gone to press, which accounts for its omission in that work.

# Christmas Greetings Don Marcks, publisher of CIRCUS REPORT

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#### Red Wagons and White Canvas: A Story of the Mollle Bailey Circus

By Marj Gurasich
Almost everyone has
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circus. Jeremiah Colquitt did just that and
became a protege of
Mollie Bailey. Known affectionately by several
generations of Texans
as "Aunt Mollie," she
ran the famous Mollie A.
Bailey Show for almost
half a century. She
called it "a Texas show
for Texas people." But
the author's biography
of this colorful lady entrepreneur is for everyone who loves a circus.
The author who grew

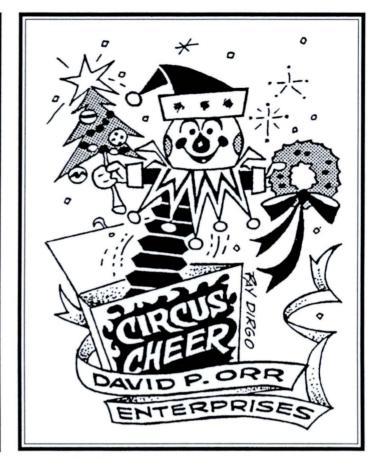


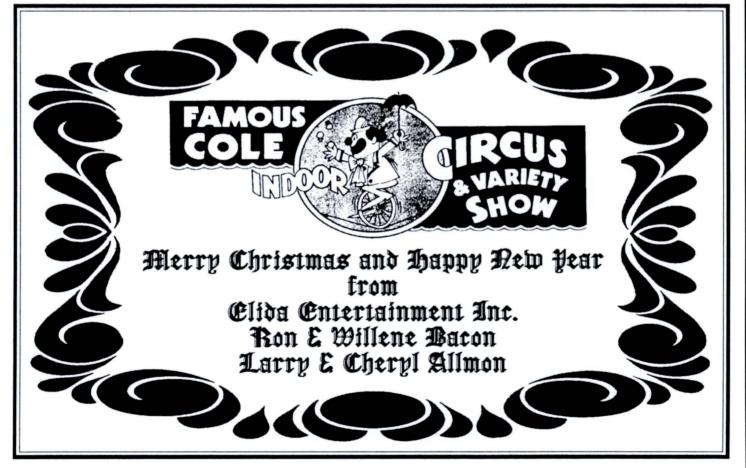
The author, who grew up in Gary, Indiana, and now lives in Houston, not only researched the life of Mollie Bailey but also the traveling circus of that turn-of-the-century era. While the story reads like a novel, the author is faithful in depicting this storybook circus queen. Even Jeremiah, whom Mollie called "Cotton," had a real life counterpart. 5 3/4 x 8 3/4, illustrated, glossary of circus terms and extensive bibliography.

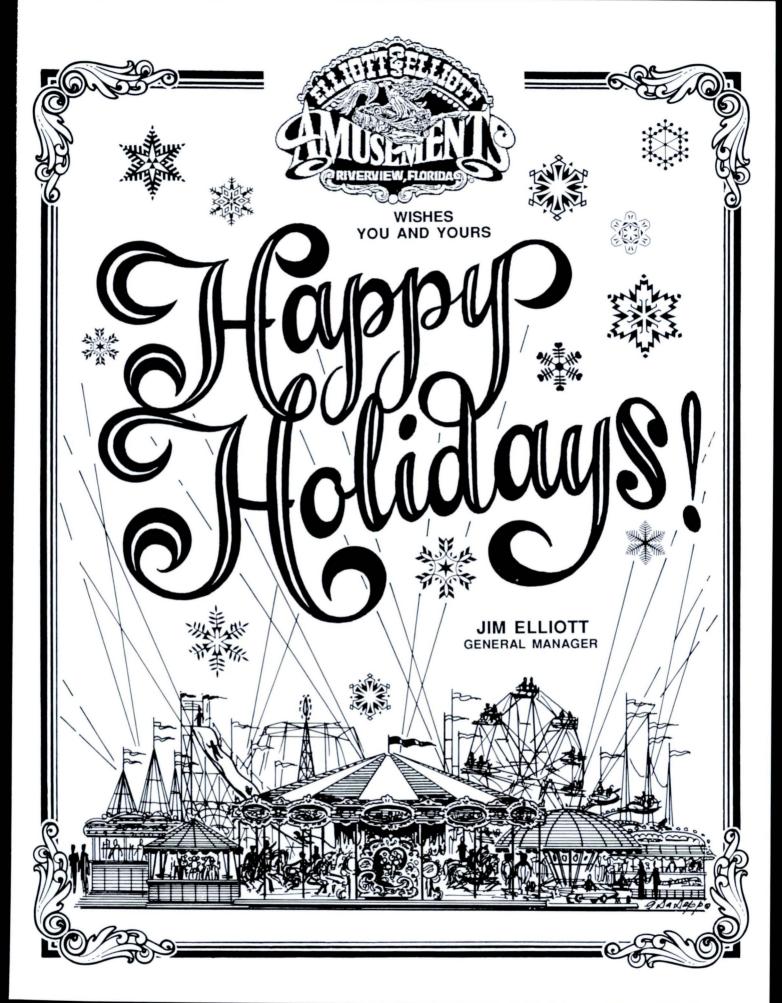
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P. T. Barnum, The Legend And The Man, by A. H. Saxon (New Columbia, York, 1989), 435 pp., illus.

As a group, commentators on circus history have generally denigrated P. T. Barnum's contribution to the institution. It has been the habit to give the credit for the success of the Barnum circus first to

W. C. Coup, and then to the second generation of Flatfoots. Barnum was usually portrayed as the money man whose involvement was mainly in having his autobiography sold before the show-tickets went on sale. In this new, meticulously researched biography, Arthur Saxon seeks to give Barnum a place as an interested and integral part of the management of his show, and to this writer he seems to have succeeded. For this reason alone we urge our readers to avail themselves of the work.

The circus, of course, but one piece of Barnum's busy career. If the showman himself was asked what he considered his most important accomplishment we feel sure he would nominate his American Museum in New York. Close behind would

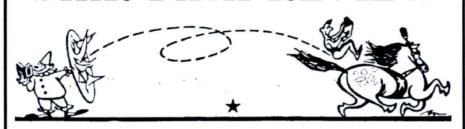
autobiography (over a million sold), copies which he saw as a means to instill his philosophy of hard work and perseverance in his readers.

be his best-selling

Barnum was so much more than a circus man that it seems picayune to discuss him in those terms. He has been installed as one of the great cultural figures of the nineteenth century in America. He is seen as the classic example of the Jacksonian era phrase relating to the "rise of the common man." As such he appeals to all of us who hold that the circumstance of birth and the lack of family heraldry are of no consequence in evaluating the worth of a person. He appealed in the same terms to his contemporaries, who saw no one quite like him, no one so self-advertised, in their

This writer was once asked to lecture to

### STAR BACK REVIEW



a university class in American Culture of the Romantic Era. The professor was seeking someone knowledgable in circus history, which he saw as the unique entertainment of the common man. The essence of the experience, for me, was the identification by the students of Niagara Falls and P.T. Barnum as natural and human embodiements of America's variety and exhaustless energy.

This amazing energy comes alive in Saxon's book as we follow the subject-better, the hero-through a life of

> boundless activity which Barnum sometimes derisively referred to as "money-grubbing."

We have been prepared by Saxon's earlier works for Barnum's involvement in the Universalist Church, with the Temperance movement, and in politics, but in this volume it is all brought together, and is given the icing-on-the cake of Saxon's prodigious research.

The notes for the biography occupy sixtysix pages and in our opinion are as fascinating as the narrative itself. We have long admired Saxon's thoroughness ("he would cross ocean to verify a comma," as a fa-

mous historian said of a colleague) and he has not disappointed us here. As persons presumably interested in all aspects of circus history, we are indeed fortunate that Arthur Saxon practices his craft in our favorite milieu. Stuart Thayer

Circus Vignettes. Saebos Productions (Bob and Sandi Sabia) 55 minutes, color, VHS only \$49.95.

Have you ever seen Downie Bros. or Barnett Bros. in color? Or better yet, the horse drawn street parade of Parker & Watts Circus in color? Few, if any, can answer in the affirmative. The fact that this

video is all in color and picturing circuses, large and small, some over fifty years ago, makes this latest offering by the Sabias a real jewel and a video collector's dream.

This is the second in a series of three to come out featuring films of the William Judd, a former president of the Circus

Fans Association, which are part of the holdings of the New Britain, Connecticut Youth Museum. By transfer of the original 16mm films to video the historic images are thus preserved for posterity and made available to those who appreciate them the most. This was Bill Judd's idea when he willed his films to the Youth Museum. For years prior to his death ludd conducted almost weekly showings of his films to church, civic, and other

The video begins with a ten minute segment titled "Clowns Galore 1939-55" and features the greats of the profession including Emmett Kelly, Otto Griebling and Felix Adler. Clowns are shown on the lot and in action in the ring in mostly Ringling-Barnum settings. Some scenes show steel tired baggage wagons.

Next come a series of motorized shows in the late 30s, 40's, and 50s, starting with Downie Bros. in 1939, the first and only season it was operated by the Moore brothers, William, and T. Leo. Noted is the dual color scheme of the vehicles. some in the older red with white lettering, others in the new orange with black lettering. This is followed by Parker & Watts, the circus at the 1939 CFA convention in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In addition to the parade the viewer is treated to a look at the lot set up, steam calliope, elephant herd, and some fine scenes of the performance under the big top.

Russell Bros. 1939, Barnett Bros. 1938, and Wallace Bros. 1941 follow. All of these picture tents on the lot, vehicles, elephants, often in their spec trappings, and

personnel.

Other mudders represented are Hagan-Wallace c-1951; Beers-Barnes early 50s; Mills Bros. 1958; Kelly-Morris early 50s showing the numerous menagerie lead stock which came from the closed Cole Bros. The 1950-58 Hunt Bros. footage is exceptionally good including the spec and part of the performance in an open air setting. The popular King Bros. Circus of the early-mid 50s pictures the revival of the daily street parade in 1953, and

yes, Judd did indeed space his film properly to include the steam calliope blasting away at the end of the march. So many times we have been disappointed in parade movies when they end before the steamer comes into view. Also shown is the sad finish of the King show in 1956. But the rarest of the mud show scenes are those of the 1949 John Pawling Great London Circus at the CFA convention. That moniker was used but one season by Harold J. Rumbaugh, a former circus fan, who had purchased the James M. Cole Circus.

The Holland Classical Circus of 1942 is covered with its European style big top, along with the elephants, the truly beautiful stable of horses, and numerous acts of

the performance.

However the video isn't all truck shows. The 1947 Cole Bros. show which appeared at the CFA convention in Dayton, Ohio is well represented, with some of the best shots of the cages arriving and later spotted on the lot this reviewer has ever seen. All cages are shown and without any canvas tarps to mar the decorations. Many performers appear including the Cristianis and Paul Nelson with his horse riding seal. Clowns Freddie Freeman and Otto Griebling re-enact their famous boxing gag, a long time feature of the Cole performance.



Cole Bros. Circus cages on the way to the lot in 1947. Pfening Archives.

The well remembered Dailey Bros. Railroad Circus of 1947 is also included showing the lot, elephant herd and performers.

The piece d'resistance is left to the end, a ten minute section depicting the teardown of Ringling-Barnum at an afternoon only stand in 1953. The show had two, Idaho Falls, Idaho, and Missoula, Montana, and this was probably filmed at the latter. Although morning set-up film has often been caputured by fans, images of the teardown following the performance is a rarity. Many of us in days past would park ourselves in the rail yards to see the loading but staying on the lot to watch the action there was seldom, if ever, done.

This outstanding presentation begins

with performers leaving the big top following the finale. Then the mechanical seat wagons are folded up and made ready for departure, the side wall is taken down, and then the elephants head for train runs, followed by the seat wagons. Smaller tents come down, and the pulling of the stakes by mechanical means is accomplished. While all of this is going on the cinematographer retreats to a more distant and elevated location where the entire lot is seen in a beautiful western lo-

cale. Finally the big top canvas comes down and is loaded as are the five center poles used in the 1950-54 period, and suddenly the huge canvas city is gone. The last shots show the seat wagons being pulled up the runs and loaded onto the flat cars, and the loaded train being switched for departure. The teardown is guaranteed to make an emotional impact on all viewers, young and old.

The video is produced in a highly professional manner, well organized as to subject matter and is completely subtitled and dated, something unfortunately missing in many videos. Again thanks go to the staff of the New Britain Youth Museum and the Sabias for making it possible. We echo the sentiments in the final tribute to Judd, "thanks Bill for the memories." Joseph T. Bradbury

# To My Fellow Airchaeologists

### Fred D. Pfening III

2240 Tewksbury Road Columbus, OH 43221 [Note New Address]

#### CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY FINANCIAL STATEMENT May 1, 1989 to April 30, 1990

Cash Beginning May 1, 1989 Receipts	\$7,492.29
Dues	25,475.69
Subscriptions	2,623.00
Back Issue Sale	1,383.40
Advertising	3,657.00
Bank Interest	1,001.17
1989 Convention and Auction	12.167.50
Total	46,885.09
Expenses	
Bandwagon Printing	39,305.26
Miscellaneous	1,902.33
Postage	3,373.09
1989 Convention	5,643.23
Bank Service Charge	11.00
Total	50,234.91
Beginning Cash	7,492.29
Receipts	46,885.09
	54,377.38
Less Expenses	50.234.91
Ending Balance on Hand	\$4,142.47
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n August 27 the Glasco Sun reported, "The circus Tuesday [August 23] was a slim affair and slimly attended." This statement was the only mention the Sun made of circus day in Glasco. It was not unusual for an editor to completely ignore a show that bought no advertising. The "slim affair" ran no ads.

Leaving Glasco the unnamed show jumped 21 miles for exhibitions at Miltonvale on August 24.

"An overland circus showed in Miltonvale yesterday and last night," according to the Clay Center Times of August 25. "It is reported that the nuts from every wheel of the wagons were lost this morning just before the owners were ready to pull out. Of course, no one in Miltonvale is responsible for this mysterious disappearance, but everybody enjoyed the scene just the same, even though it was not billed."

The Miltonvale News on August 29 had a slightly different version of the company's difficulty at Miltonvale.

"The circus has come and gone. It came from Glasco Wednesday morning and left this morning for Manchester. It was a cheap show, 25 cents being the price of admission, and was well patronized in the afternoon by the country people. At night it rained so that only about thirty people were present, consequently the program was cut about half in two. This same show visited Ames two years ago. They were then traveling in a car. Some miserable wretches, after their night performance here, injured badly a wheel belonging to their band wagon, and if found should be punished severly.'

While the editor of the News was sympathetic toward the show he obviously did not consider the circus of sufficient importance to reveal its name.

There is no proof that the "slim affair" ever reached Manchester, about 30 miles from Miltonvale. In 1887 Manchester had no newspaper. Attempts to pick up the trail before Glasco and after Manchester have been fruitless. Like a few other nameless shows, this one simply vanished from the earth.

The Cowley County Fair of 1887 opened in Winfield on September 5 for a run of five days. The big attraction was Pawnee Bill's Great Wild West Show presented every day without charge to the public. An advertisement in the Winfield Weekly Courier described the treat in store for the fair goer

'PAWNEE BILL'S Great Wild West Show. "Will give free exhibitions daily on the

## THE ONLY TRIPLE-HORNED U Chapter 2 Part Two The Most Superlative Scene of Splender Ever Beheld By The Eye Of Mortal Man By Orin Copple King

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Fair Ground introducing scenes the Deadwood stage robbery, burning of the trapper's cabin Indian war dance, Cow Boy's frolics, fancy shooting, lassoing Mexican bronchos, pony express and various other wild west novelties. An Indian village of tepees, tents and wigwams, with over 300 Indian curiosities.

"PAWNEE BILL

Has under his control 12 Pawnee Indians, 8 cow boys, 4 young ladies, cow girls, 30 head of horses with full and complete paraphernalia and costumes, making one of the most attractive exhibitions ever witnessed

"A FREE EXHIBITION Each Day

Of one hour's duration. Don't miss the chance of a life time."

The Courier on Friday, September 8, reported the Fair's progress.

"MONDAY.

"Pawnee Bill and his camp are here in full force minus the Indians who are expected here tonight. His exhibitions, however, which are very interesting, will take place everyday as advertised.

"TUESDAY.

"At 11 o'clock the Wild West show took place on the race track and was exciting and interesting.

"WEDNESDAY. "At 10 o'clock the Wild West under Pawnee Bill gave its show on the race track and was witnessed by at least one thousand people. It is splendid and is improving every day. This has proved to be a great card and the fair association is to be congratulated on their good judgment in securing it.
"THURSDAY.

"The Wild West show came next (after the races) and was much more interesting than on any previous day. The burning of trappers cabin and the rescue being extremely realistic."

"FRIDAY.

'This morning opened up with not a very large attendance although the crowd was not a small one by any means. The amphitheater was filled up at an early hour and the band discoursed some sweet music for the benefit of the crowd until 11 o'clock when the parade of the 'Wild West' took place. Immediately after the parade the exhibition took place, and consisted of the Mexican dance on ponies, shooting, cowboy fun and the burning of the trapper's cabin and the rescue by the cowboys. The whole show was very interesting and elicited rounds of genuine applause. Mrs. Lillie is a good shot and is, if anything, better than her husband Pawnee Bill.

The Thirteenth Annual Exhibition of the Marion County Agricultural Society

Pawnee Bill, third from right, and a group of his riders in Witchita, Kansas in 1887. Pfening Archives.



#### Big Attraction

### AT THE COUNTY FAIR!

Winfield, Kans.,

SEPTEMBER 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9:

#### PawneeBill's

Gret Wild West Show.

Will give free exhibitions daily on the Fair Ground introducing in wild and thrilling scenes the Deadwood stage robbery, burning of the trapper's cabin, Indian war dance, Cow Boy's frolics, fancy shooting, lassoing Mexican bronchos, pony express and various other wild west novelties. An Indian village of tepees tents and wigwams, with over 300 Indian curiosities.

#### PAWNEE BILL

Has under his control 12 Pawnee Indians, 8 cow boys, 4 young ladies, cow girls, 30 head of horses with full and complete parapharnalia and costumes, making one of the mostattractive exhibitions ever witnessed.

### A FREE EXHIBITION

EACH DAY

Of one hour's duration: Don't miss the chance of a life time. This newspaper advertisement for Pawnee Bill's first season appeared in the Winfield, Kansas *Weekly Courier* on August 25, 1887. Kansas State Historical Society.

opened in Peabody on September 14 for a run of three days. Newspaper advertisements mentioned "Splendid Exhibits of Live Stock; The Finest Products of the Farm; Grand Displays of every Mechanical Art; Many exciting races. Big Bicycle Contests; Fat Man's Foot Racing; A Public Wedding on the Grounds; Finest Silk Manufactured in America From our Native Raw Silk; Prominent Speakers."

The most important announcement and the one getting the most space was for:

"PAWNEE BILL and his
Wild West Show, Indian
Village and Museum.

Have been secured at a great expense.
THIS IS AN ATTRACTION
never before offered in the State.

Pawnee Bill leaves in October for Europe.
Robbing of a Stage Coach.
Burning of a Squatter's Cabin.

Battle between Indians and Cowboys.
Genuine Indians and Cowboys camp on the grounds during fair week, and will give thrilling performances, sham battles, war dances, etc., every day of the fair.

DO NOT FAIL TO COME! One Tickets Admits Holder to All These. Excursion Rate On All Roads

A . H . LACKEY, President. J. J. FUNK, Secretary."

The ad ran in the Hillsboro Herald and the Peabody Gazette. The Marion County Anzeiger ran it in German.

The *Gazette* announced on August 4 that Lackey and Funk had signed the contract with Pawnee Bill.

"His combination consists of 30 people and horses, and the performance will consist of daring races, stage robbery scenes, attacks on the settlers' cabins, war dances, etc., revealing 'the true inwardness' of the wild west."

"True inwardness" is puzzling. After the fair had closed the *Gazette* carried a review of the show.

'The Wild West troupe of Pawnee Bill gave their exhibitions every afternoon, on the fair grounds. These include some excellent marksmanship by Bill and his girl, breaking balls with a repeating rifle—and both are good shots. The cowboy's dance, by four cowboys and four 'cow-girls' as the president of the fair termed them, is rather new work to the ponies on which all ride. Then came the expert riding, in which the cowboys showed their capacity to pick up (or miss) a rope, a hat, etc., and also to throw a lasso. The Indian dance, with music from the 'tom-tom' was cer-

tainly unique, though evidently not so grand on a large fair ground, with a small number of Indians, as it would have been at a big national 'pow-wow,' with a whole tribe, by a big camp fire. The costumes of the Indians, in full war paint and brilliant colored clothes, were very conspicuousthe young chief having evidently a complete outfit. The attack on the Deadwood stage, and the settler's cabin, were evidently not sufficiently realistic to satisfy the spectators—or the Indians—but we have not yet heard of any who were willing to become real victims to please either."

The Hillsboro Herald, September 22, reported that, "Mr. Lillie goes to Berlin, Germany, with an outfit this winter and will make a four months' stay in the German capital, playing in the Concordia theater during his stay."

In another column the *Herald* claimed that, "The cowboys gave numerous exhibitions of their skill in *not* picking up ropes, and hats, and throwing lassos &c., the capture of the Deadwood stage, and burning of the settler's cabin."

Adam Forepaugh for the season of 1887 brought forth a show that was neither fish nor fowl, a combination that was neither circus nor wild west. From Thanksgiving Day of 1886 until February, Forepaugh had enjoyed a limited partnership with Buffalo Bill and Nate Salsbury, Cody's partner, in a highly profitable presentation in Madison Square Garden of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. In May the Buffalo Bill show sailed for England leaving behind much scenery, props and equipment and a void in the entertainment market that many shows sought to fill. All of the larger shows of 1887 had a wild west contingent, but Forepaugh, thanks to the accoutrements left from the Garden extravaganza, had a favored position.

Forepaugh's advertising car arrived in Topeka on August 18, and the town was properly papered. Newspaper advertising began on September 12, when the first ad appeared in the Topeka State Journal. Other Topeka papers ran ads at later dates, but Forepaugh's frequency of insertion did not approach that of Doris & Colvin. Forepaugh used a total of 12 ads in Topeka; Doris & Colvin, 22.

Forepaugh made extensive use of handouts most of which pertained to the wild west segment. Mentioned prominently were A. H. Bogardus and his four sons in exhibitions of marksmanship.

A handout in the Kansas Democrat on September 17 told the public it would "see the greatest marksman in the world; you will see Indian warfare realistically depicted; you will see methods of capturing wild horses and buffaloes; you will see an Indian village transplanted from the



Adam Forepaugh featured his wild west during the 1887 season. Circus World Museum collection.

plains; you will see the realistic representation of Custer's Last Rally, or the-Battle of Little Big Horn; you will see every rare animal known to exist in the menagerie, all the great riders in the circus in three rings, and a deluge of exciting races in the real Roman hippodrome. You will see all your friends and neighbors there in full force, and ten times more than ever you did before in all your life."

A veritable drove of Geographical Wonders were named in the following handout in the *Democrat*.

"Cowboys and Rocky Mountain Girls.

'The following famous scouts and girlriders of the far west are with the Forepaugh and Wild West combination: Wyoming Jack, King of Cowboys; Dakota Ben, Dakota; Shanghai Bill, Montana; Jake Lawson, Colorado; Dick Curlie, Texas; Cheyenne Charley, Mike Carl, Pony Express Riders; Buckskin Bill, California Joe, Wyoming Reed, Antonio Esqueval, Cowboys and Bucking Horse Riders; Sam Southgate, Idaho; Bill Robinson, New Mexico. Girl riders of the Wild West: 'Mexis', Mexico; Maggie Reynolds, Colorado; Senora Lawande, Mexico; Prairie Flower (Indian Girl), Oregon; Lizzie Kennedy, Texas. Together with squaws, papooses, etc., all clad in the Indian garb of their wild western hames. Illustrations are also given in the most realistic manner of the solemn ceremony of kindling the council fire; tomahawking and scalping; running the gaunlet; war dances; smoking the pipe of peace; corral of Indian ponies; Indian marriage and funeral ceremonies; herd of wild buffaloes; mountain elk, pack mules, burros, antelope and coyotes, all grouped in a most appropriate and picturesque manner."

In speaking of the Little Big Horn battle the press agent reported that, "Distinguished military men from all over the country have been to the garden to witness this historical scene, and none of them were apparently more deeply interested in the mimic battle than General Sherman."

The most impressive account of Custer's Last Rally was a hand-out that appeared in the *Journal* on September 20:

"In the Face of His Enemies.

"When the gallant Custer had rallied his

men for the last time at the battle of the Little Big Horn, one soldier, the last survivor of his slain comrades, when he saw that the day was lost and his only chance of life lay in flight, turned dawn the same ravine where the horses had gone before him, in the hope of escaping. But it was of no use. He was getting along very well and might have escaped, as nobody was following him, when suddenly he came face to face with a dozen bucks who were coming up the ravine in search of stragglers. Upon one side of the steep incline he shot with all his remaining strength, but it was too late; the Indians were after him. With the calmness of despair he seated him on the bank, drew his revolver, and when the bucks were almost upon him he placed the muzzle of the weapon to his head and fired. A soldier on the ridge, fighting in the skirmish line (I believe it was in Calhoun's company) when he saw all was lost and that there was not the least chance for life, turned to his comrade fighting at his elbow and said:

"Well, George, the jig's up. Here's all my worldly wealth, and I don't mean

The Adam Forepaugh band chariot in the Lansing, Michigan parade on May 28, 1887. Pfening Archives. that these red devils shall have one cent of it.' "With these words he drew from a hip pocket a roll of crisp new treasury bills (probably the last contribution from the paymaster before he left for field service) and with his saber he cut the money into shreds and threw it in the face of his enemies.

"One of the greatest representations of the last rally of Custer in this fierce fight is given by Adam Forepaugh's great show and Wild West, which will exhibit here on the 22nd inst."

Who recorded the soldier's last words?

The circus got the short end of the publicity even though there were some sensational acts, such as Adam Forepaugh Jr.'s, 30-horse act in which he drove his team around the hippodrome at a gallop.

Typical is the following, about a quarter of a handout which appeared in the

Topeka Mail.

"Of course, the circus is more expensive and better than ever, while the hippodrome will be a revelation in the reproduction of ancient Grecian and Roman sports. Many of the features are entirely new and grand.

"Besides his new great thirty horse act, Adam Forepaugh, Jr., will introduce the quadrille elephants, the clown and boxing elephants, the tight rope walking horse 'Blondin.' 'Ouds,' the latest European sensation in aerial gymnastics, the somersault dog, the male and female riders, athletes, and scores of the first acrobats and gymnasts in the country. These are all first-class supplementary features of the great show."

Elephants were listed in the newspaper ads in a peculiar manner.

"15 Untrained Elephants!

"8 Quadrille Elephants!

"7 Tableaux and Statuesque Elephants!

"I Clown Elephant, 'Piccaniny!'

"I 'Knockout' Elephant, 'J. L. Sullivan!'

"I Bicycle Elephant, Marvelous!

"I Giant Elephant, 'Bolivar,' the Largest



in the World; more than all other Shows in America Combined Possess!"

An interesting item in the advertising was a "Giant Trotting Moose, 2:31 against time!"

After Bogardus and Adam Forepaugh, Jr., only four other performers were identified, M'lle. Daisy Bellmont, Star Equestrienne, Xavier and Orlofsky in a mount-

ed broadsword battle, and Charles Welch.

The Forepaugh show arrived in Topeka September 22 on the Union Pacific, traveling in two sections. The show came from Kansas City where, according to the Journal, "The driver of the steam piano in Forepaugh's circus procession was arrested for not having the boiler inspected."

The parade was outlined in a handout published in the *Democrat* on the 21st. Details were slim but the four sections of their procession were indicated. Four bands were placed at intervals in the line-up.

'The first section will consist of the mammoth menagerie, led by twelve elephants, and then will follow the costly and elegant dens of the giraffe, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, sea-lions, etc.

'The second section will be composed of hundreds of handsome horses, gaily decked and mounted processionists.

'The third section will be composed of the famous Wild West show. It will be led by a real Cowboy's brass band, following which will appear the old Deadwood mail coach, driven by a former knight of the whip of the Overland Mail company, and a delegation of far west Indians, in full war paint and feathers, and a hundred plainsmen, scouts, savages, sharpshooters, etc., all dressed in wild west garb and mounted on Indian ponies.

"The fourth section will present the circus celebrities and special features, such as Cleopatra and her barge of gold, Lallah Rookh, princess of Delhi, and then comes the great Mikado of Japan, and all his royal court, led by the band from the town of Titipu."

None of the Topeka papers reported the actual composition of the parade. It was after 12 o'clock when the procession left the lot at Thirteenth Street and Topeka Avenue. Thousands of people had cometo Topeka to attend the state fair and most of them saw the parade. The *Journal* estimated the crowd along a six block stretch of the main street, Kansas Avenue, at 20,000 people. The population of Topeka at the time was 23,000.

The *Democrat* called the parade the "finest ever made in Topeka." Attendance was excellent. The *Democrat* estimated that 12,000 persons saw the evening performance.

Forepaugh moved on to Leavenworth for exhibitions on September 23, which received scant newspaper coverage.

The Atchison Daily Globe was generous



Adam Forepaugh Circus poster printed by the Calhoun Company for the 1887 season. Pfening Archives.

in the space it gave Forepaugh for the exhibitions of September 24. On August 29 the *Globe* reported:

"Louis E. Cook [Cooke], general manager of the Forepaugh show, is in the city to-day. Mr. Cook is the genius who put the Forepaugh show into New York for the first time, where it turned away people for nine weeks, and there is little doubt that it is the greatest on earth. It carries fifty-one cars, or eleven more than the Barnum, and all the great circus lights are in its employ. Those people who see the Forepaugh show on the 26th [sic] of September can rest assured that they have seen the greatest tented exhibition ever organized."

The next day the *Globe* ran another instructive report inspired by Cooke:

"Louis E. Cook [Cooke] says that the hobby of Adam Forepaugh, who owns more show property than any other man on earth, is meat. Forepaugh was once a butcher, and still imagines that he is the only man connected with the show who can make a good bargain in the purchase of meat. The first thing he does every morning is to order his buggy, and visit the butcher shops, and it is a common saying around the show, when the old man cannot be found, that he is out buying meat. Mr. Forepaugh is much better tempered of late years than formerly, by

reason of his second marriage, which occurred three or four years ago to a young lady of fine family in Philadelphia. Mrs. Forepaugh travels with the show, and is idolized by every one, and it is believed that the great show could not get on smoothly without her. Mr. Cook says that young Ad. Forepaugh, son of old Adam, is the hardest working show man in

is the hardest working show man in America. He works from daylight until dark, and does several of the best acts in the ring, including the riding and driving of thirty-one horses. In addition to this he is general director of amusements, and has general charge of the show. The Forepaugh elephants are the most wonderful in the world, and young Ad. trained them all. It is generally understood, although Mr. Cook will not admit it, that the late Forepaugh white elephant is now doing the clown with this season's show."

> How the show fared in Atchison is a mystery for

the papers had little to say following the exhibitions. The *Globe* made no reference to the attendance but did publish three short items.

"Note to circus proprietors: The people are becoming dreadfully sick of Wild West shows. Mr. Forepaugh has the good sense to introduce all of his Wild West foolishness early in the performance, and rush it through.

'Two colored boys, employes of the circus, were arrested at the circus grounds on Saturday night for discharging fire arms. The one who owned the revolver was fined \$20, and the other, who only discharged it, \$5, in the police court this morning.

"While in Atchison Adam Forepaugh bought a monster steer of J. K. McGregor, of Wichita. The animal weighs 4,500 pounds, and is a little over four years old. It is said that the price was \$10,000, but this is probably a great big foolisher."

Late in the season John Robinson's 10 Big Shows, hurrying home for the winter, made one date in Kansas, October 31. The Dodge City *Democrat* of October 15 announced that "The first and last circus of the season will be here on the 31st."

Forepaugh once used a lithograph featuring Ben Lusbie, "Lightening Ticket Seller of the World," who, it was claimed sold more than 6,100 tickets in one hour. Lusbie's feat was impressive, but it faded to nothing after John Robinson's handout in the *Democrat* revealed that, "Charles

Robinson, the electric ticket seller, had his hands full (in Chicago), and disposed of thirteen thousand tickets in thirty-one minutes."

All of which proves that the first one doesn't have a chance.

On the other hand, perhaps Charley sold the entire performance to a single purchaser, but, if so, what took him so long?

Most newspapers looked askance at throw away sheets advertising local merchants which some circuses distributed to the crowds on show day. Most editors thought the money should have been spent with them. The Democrat, however, supported the efforts of J. M. J. Kane of "Old John Robinson's great moral show," and proclaimed that, "All favors shown him will be a positive and substantial benefit to our local dealers." Perhaps the Democrat had the printing contract.

After the show had came and gone the *Democrat* published a flattering review.

#### "THE CIRCUS.

"John Robinson's circus and menagerie gave two exhibitions in our city last Monday. The patronage was not as good as was anticipated by the management, but was very fair. Those who attended the show were highly delighted with it throughout. There were no 'sandys' or fakes run on the unwary, and the treatment the public received from the circus people was gentlemanly and courteous.

"It is safe to say that a more brilliant and thrilling performance was never seen under canvas in this city, and the actors without a single exception covered themselves with

laurels. To compliment every one individually would be impossible, but not to mention the De Motts and Eddys would be unfair. The superb horsemanship of William De Mott elicited expression of wonderment and admiration from the spectators. While his horse was

running at full speed he jumped from the ground to an upright position on the animal's back, besides doing innumerable

astonishing feats in addition to this. His claims to the championship are indeed well sustained. The riding of Josie De Mott, his sister, was also the acme of perfection. To give her all the praise she deserves is beyond our power, but suffice it to say that the young lady's graceful motions and daring acts won unstinted applause."

The Dodge City date was the last of the season and the Robinson show headed home to Cincinnati. En route the train stopped in Topeka long enough to get into trouble.

This Robinson newspaper ad appeared in the Dodge City Kansas Democrat on October 15, 1887. Kansas State Historical Society.

"John Robinson's show pulled into the city on three mammoth railroad trains," the Topeka State Journal reported, "and one of the roustabouts got off and sold to a workman a considerable quantity of brass fittings, for \$2.50. He hadn't had the articles very long before a foreman of one of the circus gangs came to him and said the property was stolen and took it away from him. The man who had bought the brass telephoned for the police. The patrol wagon turned out and was loaded up with police, the general supposition prevailing that if any circus men were to be arrested the chances of a riot were pretty strong. The wagon whirled away rapidly to

the Santa Fe depot with police whistles sounding and picking up blue-coated reinforcements on the line of march. The municipal army arrived at the depot and found the man who had been done out of the two dollars and a half, but the man who had done the deed had concealed

himself and the police came back empty-handed."

On November 5, the Dodge City *Demo-crat* carried the following:

"John Robinson's show, which was in our city last Monday, was wrecked last Thursday at St. Louis. One man was killed and two wounded. Several of the animals escaped, causing quite a panic among the citizens. It is said that no policemen or newspaper men asked for complimentary tickets for the show."

S. H. Barrett, Doris & Colvin, Sells Brothers, Forepaugh and John Robinson, all big railroad shows, played Kansas to satisfactory business in 1887, but the big news of the season, unrecognized at the time, concerned a small wagon show that brought its name before the Kansas public for the first time. The tour itself, 16 towns, was not as newsworthy as those of the big shows mentioned above, but with the passage of years the insignificant mud show eclipsed them all and the big news of 1887 was certainly made by the Ringling brothers.

On August 25 at Belleville, Ringling Brothers 5 Big United Monster Shows, Great Double Circus, Museum, Egyptian Caravan and Royal European Menagerie made its first appearance on Kansas soil. The first news of its coming appeared in the Belleville *Democrat* of August 19 which carried a two column ad and a handout. The advertisement which had no illustrations, is quoted below in its entirety:

"THE ONLY BIG SHOW

Coming to Belleville this year is the great show of the Universe, will exhibit at Belleville, Thursday Aug. 25

It is coming in all its Matchless Splendor and Unparalled Magnitude, blazing forth in sunlit magnificence and bursting with a myriad of unforseen wonders

RINGLING BROTHERS,
5 Big United Monster Shows
Great double Circus, Museum,
Ancient Egyptian Caravan
and Royal European Menagerie
A Dozen Fortunes Invested.

A wealth of worlds wonders beneath a sky of canvas.

More Show For Less Money Than Vision Ever Saw.

A MIGHTY MENAGERIE, Containing all species of wild, ferocious animals worth seeing under the sun.

5 FUNNY, FAMOUS CLOWNS,

A regiment of star circus performers, champion bare back riders, the best leapers, tumblers, acrobats, gymnast, and most daring male and female performers in the world.

CLASSIC GROUP OF TRAINED HORSES,

Wonderfully educated Shetland ponies,



بمعودة وورور ومسالي ومخصصه ماستوسمه

comic mules, troupes of performing dogs, goats and monkeys.

GRAND FREE STRÉET PARADE. Crimsoned with the radiant luster of the noon day sun, reflecting scenes more grand than king or conqueror ever beheld. Tons upon tons, block after block of costliest gold and glitter. A mighty moving mass of wealth, wonder, splendor and sweet sounds. Open dens of wild animals, towering camels. A grand free street pageant one mile long. It will pay to come 100 miles to see.

"2 Brilliant & Bewildering Performances

"Admission to the Grandest Show on Earth only 25 cts."

The fourth year of the Ringling show opened in its hometown of Baraboo, Wisconsin on May 7. The Baraboo *Republic* on April 27, named most of the performers:

"Their Great Double Circus embraces a coterie of star performers among whom will be found such noted riders as Joe Parsons, Mlle. La Rui, famous acrobats like the Baretta Bros., Castellos, Ortonesete; funny clowns including McCaffroty, Memhardt and Gay; fearless aerialists such as Mlle. La Vanion, Mme. Kutts, Miss Louisa Bowman and numerous male mid-air performers; noted equilibrists such as Jerome Abbey, Mlle. Luando and a score of other equally novel and wonderful components."

In another paragraph the *Republic* reported that the brothers had purchased the entire menagerie of the Miles Orton show. "They have from time to time," the paragraph continued, "been making importations of wild animals from the depots of America, until now their catalogue of zoological attractions embrace a vast number of the most curious species known to scientific research."

The menagerie in 1887 consisted of a kangaroo, a deer, monkeys, two lions, an elk, birds and a bear, requiring five cages. When the brothers advertised a mile-long street parade they were grossly exaggerating.

The Belleville *Democrat* following circus day reported that, "Ringling Bros. circus was here last Thursday and although there was a heavy rain all day the tent was well filled afternoon and evening. It is a small show but a good one and was much better than many fifty cent shows and is well worthy of patronage."

The Belleville *Telescope* agreed with the *Democrat*. "The rain kept many away that would otherwise have attended. Several features of it was [sic] as good as we have seen in the largest railroad circuses. If they visit Belleville again they will be sure of a good attendance."

Since the Telescope carried no Ringling



In 1887 the Ringlings called their wagon show "the Greatest Show on Earth." Kansas State Historical Society.

advertisement there was no obligation to gild the lilly.

The exhibitions at Washington on August 27 were a huge success. The Washington County Register had much to say after the show had come and gone.

"Our city presented a lively appearance show day.

'The blind man with his music box found his way in town on circus

"Over one hundred guests registered at the American hotel on circus day.

"The showmen made headquarters at the Central and St. James hotels during their stay in the city."

According to the Washington *Post* the Ringling show "Sundayed in the city."

The Register gave the aggregation a glowing endorsement: "Ringling Bros.

cast their city of tents at this place on last Saturday and gave the people of this place and surrounding country an opportunity of seeing the wonders of their museum and menagerie and witnessing two performances of their circus, and we can heartily say that there never was a show in this place that gave the universal satisfaction that they did. Everybody went away more than pleased. The entire company were kind, obliging and accommodating, and during their stay made many warm friends who will welcome their return. They were much pleased with Washington and indicated that in all probability they would return here in about two months and make this place their winter quarters. If they should conclude to do so, we have no doubt but that they will find the people here ready to extend a hearty welcome to them.

In another column under the heading of "Circus Day Notes," the *Register* reported, "Twenty loads of watermelons arrived in town by 9 o'clock a. m.

"One of the city officials wanted the disguised man at the circus arrested. He thought it a shame that a man should become intoxicated and interrupt the performance.

"Jim Hammond offered to bet one dollar and a half that he could perform any part of the concert. He found no takers.

"To the credit of Ringling Bro's. it can be said that not a 'fakir' was in the city.

"The candidates were busy shaking hands with their country friends.

"The restaurants did a rushing business.

"The circus tent was packed to its utmost capacity to witness the afternoon performance.

"Some of our merchants took advantage of the crowd that there was in town and did considerable advertising, and they will no doubt realize the benefits of it in the near future.

"The brilliant and dazzling (?) procession was witnessed by about three thousand people."

The Five Big United Shows moved on August 29 to Greenleaf, 12 miles away.

The Greenleaf *Journal* pronounced the Ringling show "a very creditable one for the money. The performances were good. Almost 2,000 people attended the circus here Monday. The seating capacity of the show was all taken. The owners and managers of Ringling Bros. circus are gentlemen and do all they agree. They use everybody well and pay their bills."

"And pay their bills"--the highest praise an editor could bestow.

"Mr. Otto and Al Ringling proprietors of the Ringling United Shows paid their complements to this office," the Greenleaf Herald reported, and we found them very agreeable and pleasant gentlemen."

In another column, "It is very seldom that the HERALD gives glowing notices of small shows for the purpose of deceiving the public but we cannot refrain from giving Ringling Bros. United Show credit for being the only circus which fills its program to the letter. They strictly prohibit use of profane language show people are wont to use, they have no gang of robbers with them or following them. The performance was splendid and did credit Barnum and Forepaugh. special features we noted, the Juggling, the Horizontal bar and Trapeze acts, the wonderful Trick Pony and Al Ringling's school of Trained dogs, in fact it is the best show for the money we ever witnessed."

The show used but one handout on their Kansas tour and it appeared in the press of every town they played. The quote below is from the Frankfort Sentinel, August 26:

"A Grand Holiday for Everybody.

"At last we are to have one of the largest shows on the road, a genuine, big circus and menagerie on August 31st. Ringling Brothers' five big united monster shows, great double circus, museum, Ancient Egyptian caravan, will spread their mammoth city of canvas in Frankfort. They are highly spoken of by the press of the state, as being first-class in every department and having one of the best shows now traveling. may have created a wonderful furor among the amusement loving people, by reducing their price of admission down to one-half its former price. Only 25 cents to see a first-class, fifty cent circus and menagerie, and almost anyone can afford to pay 25 cents when they know they will see a good show. Their street parade, one mile long, of gold and glitter, beautiful ladies, noble knights in brilliant armor, open dens of wild animals, towering camels, blooded horses from England and Kentucky, smallest Shetland ponies in the world, bands of music, filling the air with melody. Tons upon tons, block after block of costliest gold and glitter, a solid, moving mass of wealth, wonder, splendor and sweet sounds, worth going a hundred miles to see, free to everybody. Owing to arrangements made by the showmans' pooling league, will prevent any other show from visiting Marshall county this year. Everybody turn out as this will be a Gala Day for Frankfort."

The Frankfort Bee thought the "Ringling Bros circus was exceedingly good," and "brought a big crowd to town.

"One of the lady actors with the show," according to the Bee, "hit a man square between the eyes with her fist, Wednesday, knocking him to the earth. Cause: he insulted her."

The Seneca Courier-Democrat on August 26 carried an ad for the exhibitions of September 2, and also ran the one and only handout, but more interesting was a report of the visit of the advance man.

"Dick Hunter the advance manager of Ringling Bros.' Circus called at this office this week and interviewed the gang. Dick is one of the best fellows on earth and there is always a seat for him in the front row. While he looks closely after the inter-

"To the credit of Ringling Bro's. it can be said that not a 'fakir' was in the city." Washington County Register, August 28, 1887

> est of his show, he is liberal with newspapers and makes friends for his employers from the first. His show is a good one and the show has an equally good man ahead of it and it is always a pleasure to do business with such a man as Dick Hunter.'

> September 3 was circus day in Sabetha and was properly reported by the Nemaha County Republican in the following review: "Ringling Bros. Five Big United Monster Shows' arrived in Sabetha last Saturday, and those who saw the procession in the afternoon wondered what sort of a display one of these 'five big united monsters' would make when the whole five, well stretched out, made a procession scarcely two blocks in length. It's a long time since we had a circus of any kind in Sabetha, and this one attracted a very large crowd to the city--more people, in fact, than had been here at one time for several months-and most of them went to the show. The low price of admission was also a drawing card, and helped to swell the multitude. The menagerie part of the show was decidedly thin, but the circus was very good in some particulars. There was a decided scarcity of good riding and almost a total dearth of female performers, but the contortionists, jugglers and tumblers did very well, and most of the audience, we believe, considered they got the worth of their money, and we know they did if they waited for the concert and heard Mrs. James sing, 'When My Jamie Comes Over the Sea."

> The Nortonville News published Ringling's advertisement for the exhibitions of September 10 and ran the handout. No doubt it accepted money from the management, but the day before the circus the News in a fit of hypocrisy proclaimed, "The circus will be something of a temptation to the average Sabbatarian young boy, but every properly trained youth has

too much respect for his Sabbath principles to break them for the sake of a monkey, camel, elephant or kangaroo."

The editor, no doubt, preferred vinegar to pink lemonade.

The Valley Falls Register of September 16 stated, 'The Ringling brothers show may conclude to winter here." When the show played Washington on August 27 the Washington papers indicated that Washington might become the winter home of the Ringling Brothers circus. Were the brothers seriously prospecting suitable site: were

> looking for a financial arrangement; were they dissatisfied with Baraboo; or were they merely having a polite flirtation?

The Register, speaking of the exhibitions of September 12, remarked that, "Every-

body was well pleased with the exhibit. In fact it was a real good show for the money, all around. Come again boys."

The Kansas route follows with population figures where available: August 24, Chester, Nebraska; August 25, Belleville, 1190; August 26, Haddam, 360; August 27, Washington, 2031; August 29, Greenleaf, 1033; August 30, Waterville, 609; August 31, Frankfort, 1010; September 1, Centralia, 339; September 2, Seneca, 1983; September 3, Sabetha, 1368; September 5, Wetmore, 450; September 6, Holton, 2679; September 7, Muscotah; September 8, Horton, 1133; September 9, Effingham; September 10, Nortonville, 569; September 12, Valley Falls, 1272; September 13, Oskaloosa, 828; September 14, Perry, 316; September 15, Tonganoxie, 561; September 16, Eudora, 673; September 17, Olathe, 3463; September 19, Spring Hill, 1131; September 20, Louisburg, 886 and September 21, Freeman, Missouri.

Everywhere the Ringling Brothers' 5 Big United Monster Shows played the comments in the Kansas press were strongly favorable. The only features that drew any adverse comment were the parade and the menagerie, both of which were considered to be "thin," but none of the criticisms were vicious and the performances under the canvas appeased their worst detractors. The brothers themgentlemen were respected wherever they went. Their employees were courteous and shunned profanity. There are no accounts of sharp practices, gambling, nor out-and-out lies. Instead there was cleanliness, civility, honesty, integrity, and first-class showmanship--5 Big United Virtues 5--that would take the Ringlings to the pinnacle of the circus

Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video, Topeka, Kansas.



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